

PERIYA PURANAM

A Tamil Classic
On The
Great Saiva Saints
Of South India



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SEKKIZHAAR

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*A Tamil Classic on the great
Saiva Saints of South India*

BY

SEKKIZHAAR

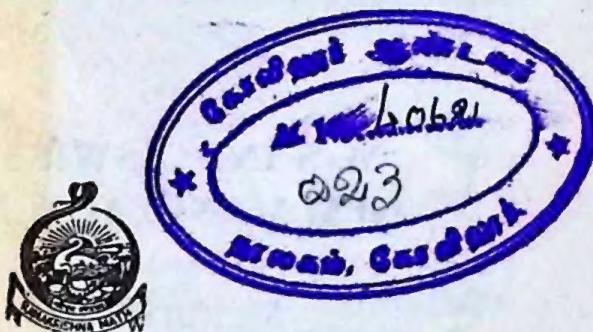
Condensed English Version

BY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We have great pleasure in placing before our readers this exposition in English of Periya Puranam, one of the seminal texts of Saiva Siddhanta.

References to Siva and the worship of Siva are extant even in the earliest Tamil literature. Siva as conceived in Saiva Siddhanta is not merely one of the Trimurtis, but the Supreme Being to whom Brahma and Vishnu offer obeisance. Siva is called Pati or Master with the five functions of Srishti (Origination), Sthiti (Sustentation), Samhara (destruction), Tirodhana (veiling) and Anugraha (Grace). The Jiva or human soul is called Pasu or animal because it is tied up by Pasa or the rope of bondage. This Pasa is the result of three impurities or Malas. The Anava-Mala is due to primordial ignorance—what is called Avidya in Advaita. Karma-mala accrues from the good and bad deeds of the Jiva. Maya-mala is the impurity arising from attachment to the world. To efface the Karma-mala and Maya-mala four paths are prescribed. First is *Sariyai* consisting in external acts of worship like cleaning the temple, gathering flowers for the deity etc. This is called Dasa Marga or the path of the servant. This leads to Salokya, or residing in God's abode. The second stage is *Kriyai* consisting in intimate service to God. This is called Satputra Marga, the path of the good son. This takes the devotee nearer to God, Samipya.

The third stage is *Yoga* which implies internal worship or meditation. This is Sakhya Marga, the path of friendship. This leads to Sarupa, attaining the form of God. The last path is *Jnana*, the path of Sanmarga, because it takes the devotee to Sat, which is God. This leads to Sayujya, union with God. It is said that these disciplines can remove only Karma-mala and Maya-mala, while the Anava-mala can be removed only by God's grace.

This theology was systematized only late in the 13th Century A.D. by Meykanda Deva in his *Siva-Jnana-Bodham* which is the basic text of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. Two other authoritative

texts are the *Siva-Jnana-Siddhiyar* of Arulnandi and *Siva-prakasam* of Umapati Sivacharya. But the great period of Saivism was when the sixty three canonical saints, called the Nayanmars or the Adiyars, lived and showed the people the way of devotion to Siva. The Periya Puranam of Sekkizhaar is a literary masterpiece delineating the lives, deeds and sayings of these servants of the Lord. Of these Appar, Thirugnana Sambandar, Sundaramoorthy Swamikal and Manikkavachakar are the four pillars of the edifice of Saiva Siddhanta. In this present work, the hagiography of the first three is dealt with in detail and that of the other Nayanmars in a briefer form.

The translation in English has been done by a well-versed Saivite scholar, Sri G. Vanmikanathan. We are thankful to Sri N. Mahalingam, the eminent industrialist, who has not only functioned as the General Editor of this book, but has also substantially subsidized the publication. We hope that this magnificent devotional poem will enable the readers to dwell in auspiciousness or Sivam.

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PREFACE

The Periyapuram is an account of the lives of Saivite Saints who lived in the Tamil Kingdoms hundreds of years ago. The lives of sixty three Saints are spoken of in the Periyapuram. These Saints do not belong to any one community; they hail from various communities—high and low, rich and poor. They have brought into the lime-light the various aspects of Saivism.

Reference is made to these Saints and their lives in the works and commentaries of Saiva Siddhanta, works such as *Sivagnana Siddhiar* and *Thirukkalitruppadiar*. Any one who reads the lives of these Nayanmars will no doubt be impressed by the sense of devotion they had for the Almighty. This is the underlying theme of the whole of *Periyapuram*, although the methods followed by the Nayanmars are not the same. The life of each and every Saint is a grand illustration of the emancipation of the soul in its search for the Supreme Divine Being.

The lives of these Saints are told in various works in Tamil, Sanskrit, Canarese and Telugu. However, the most ancient of them are in Tamil and Sanskrit. The one in Tamil is called *Periyapuram* or *Thiru Thondar Puranam* authored by Sekkizhaar. This version is based on *Thiru Thondaththokai* of Sundaramoorthy Swamigal and *Thiruthondar Thiruvandadi* of Nambiandar Nambi. The date of Sundaramoorthy Swamigal is the eighth century after Christ and that of Nambiandar Nambi is the tenth century. Sekkizhar lived in the eleventh century and was the prime minister in the court of Kulothunga Chola who reigned during the eleventh century.

Saint Umapathi Sivacharya of the thirteenth century has also authored an account of the lives of these Saints. His work entitled *Thiruthondar Purana Saram*, is also based on the *Thiruthonda Thokai* of Nambiandar Nambi. Of the works in Tamil, the *Thiruthonda Thokai* of Sundaramurthy Swamigal is the first. It also forms part of the Saint's Tevarams. This decade contains ten songs beginning with the words, "I am the servant of the servants of the servants of

Tillai" (தில்லை வாழ் அந்தனர் தம் அடியார்க்கும் அடியேன்). These Tevarams were composed in Tillai and relate, in a very brief form, the lives of all the saints.

The most important of all the works relating to the lives of the Saints is that of Sekkizhaar and contains detailed information on the lives of the Saints. Since that date, Sekkizhaar's work has taken a place next only to the Tevaram and Thiruvachakam and has been the source of information and solace to all devotees.

Sekkizhaar, being an admirer of nature and beauty like the Nayanmars, has expressed himself in a simple, sober style. His poetry charms all readers and large audiences have been held spell bound by the recitation of the *Periyapuranaam*. It is not only a document of Hindu religious history but is also a literary masterpiece which should attract every student of Tamil Literature.

Thiru G. Vanmikanathan, author of many books such as "Pathway to God trod by St. Ramalingar", and "Pathway to God through Thiruvachagam" has dealt with the subject in an excellent manner, grouping the subjects under suitable captions and has given lucid translations of Sekkizhaar.

Much would depend on the mental make-up of the reader in understanding the lives of these Saints. If one's faith is strong, he can read them as absolute truth and believe them as true—which is sure to strengthen him in his spiritual life. He can read them for the spiritual guidance that could be taken from the lives of the saints. Most of Periyapuranaam carries the teachings on the surface, but one has to dive deeper to pick up the rare gems.

This being the first comprehensive English work on Periyapuranaam, it will be of immense value to the English-knowing public as well I am happy that I am associated with this publication.

I am particularly thankful to Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, former Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University, for having given a Foreword to the book, which is by itself a literary masterpiece.

I am very much indebted to Swami Tapasyananda for getting the sanction of the Headquarters of Sri Ramakrishna Math to publish

this great work of Sekkizhaar. Sri-la-Sri Kasivasi Arulnandi Thambiran Swamikal, Head of Tiruppanandal Mutt, always desired that a religious museum based on Periyapuram should be set up at Madras and I do hope that this work will be the prelude to that great work. I am also indebted to all members of the Ramakrishna Math who assisted the work and my respectful regards to Thiru Vanmikanathan for his erudite work done at his ripe old age.

N. MAHALINGAM

FOREWORD

I could not understand why a scholar of eminence and seasoned writer like my esteemed friend Thiru G. Vanmikanathan, should ask me to contribute a Foreword to what is his most ambitious effort yet, "The Condensed English Version of Periyapuraram". My knowledge of Tamil poetry is small, and of Tamil Saivism even less. It could be that, coming from an elder, the assignment was meant to give me an opportunity to rectify my ignorance to some extent at least. If so, it is a kindness and not alone an honour extended to me. And, indeed, I have tried to make what profitable use I can of this singular compulsion to plunge into the confluence of Sekkizhaar and Vanmikanathan, only to be buffeted between Sekkizhaar's encyclopaedic hagiology and divine poesy, and Vanmikanathan's polyphonic reasonings and twin harmonies of prose and verse, and presently, edified as well as exhausted, to feel fulfilled by the sheer exhilaration of the unique adventure.

Since the publication of his edition of V. V. S. Aiyar's, "Kamba Ramayana: A Study", G. V. has conquered, as it were, whole continents in the 'realms of gold'. Hadn't he received our revered Jagadguru Kanchi Periyaval's benediction and ordainment for the future, "Even like this, may you persevere in your service to Tamil!" Sure enough, G.V.'s prose translation of Tirukkural appeared in 1969, and was followed two years later, by Pathway to God through Tamil Literature (Part I—Through the 'Tiruvachakam'). It was a gallant, if also arduous, exercise in interpretation and verse translation, and more or less set the pattern for the literary ministry of the coming years. With Professor R.D. Ranade's classic trilogy of 'The Pathway to God' in Kannada, Marathi and Hindi literatures for an exemplum, G.V. scheduled his own comprehensive Agenda:

"Before my desire is completely fulfilled, two or three more books should be written, one on the path shown by the first Seven Tirumurais and the Tenth Tirumurai—the Tirumandiram—another on the path shown by Thayumanavar and Ramalinga Swamigal, and a third on the

path shown by the Alwars. There could be another book on the path shown by the Siddhars."

Aside from significant fall-out activities like essays and discourses and the well-cut monographs on Appar, Manikkavasagar and Ramalingar, G.V.'s major achievement of the next quinquennium was Pathway to God trod by Saint Ramalingar (1976), a massive tome including verse translations of nearly 1000 stanzas from Tiru-Arutpa. And now, piling Pelion on Ossa, 'This Condensed English Version of Periyapuram.' In his late seventies and early eighties, G. V. Pillay retains the buoyancy and commands the purposive energy that might well put to shame a much younger man.

The Tamil Saiva Canon comprises the twelve Tirumurais: the first seven (collectively called 'Tevaram') being the outpourings of Tirugnana Sambandhar, Appar and Sundarar, the eighth (called 'Tiruvachakam') those of Manikkavasagar, the ninth (called 'Tiru-isaippa') a miscellaneous collection, the tenth (called 'Tirumanadiram') being the mystic recordations of Tirumovlar, the eleventh another miscellaneous collection, and the twelfth and last is Sekkizhaar's Periyapuram that weaves into a splendid epic narrative the lives of the sixty-three Tamil Saiva Saints. The Canon brings together nearly 20,000 verses, and the usings, meditations and affirmations of twenty-six singer-saints. Like the twelve Alwars (including the marvellous mystic-minstrel, Andal) of the Vaishnava Tamil Canon, the 'sixty three' Nayanmars too form a mighty aggregate who assert eternal Providence and exemplify the ways of the Divine to purblind humanity. The 'sixty-three' and a 'motley' assembly of the Siva-intoxicated, some movingly and memorably 'Vocal' but many dumb in their overmastering devotion to the Lord; drawn from all regions of Tamil Nadu (and even beyond), and from all castes, classes, professions, stages of life, and from both sexes; householders all, yet ascetic in their renunciation of meat, hunting, anger, pride and greed; and addicts of a divine humanism that swears by service of the interpenetrating universes of man, flora and fauna. The 'sixty-three' make a world of ardours, aspirations, intensities, contradictions, seeming aberrations, sore trials, startling transcendences, yet it is a world wonderfully held together and sustained by the Bhakti *elan vital*, by the love of God, and of the God in all, and the unfailing ambiance of Divine Grace.

These prophets and practitioners of God-love, these adepts and laureates of Bhakti,—these servitors, these children, these comrades of Siva — these devotees of the Divine's exemplars, these sixty-three darlings of Infinity, as they make their appearance and leap into scintillating life in Sekkizhaar's poetic universe, they acquire a 'criticality' that engineers their prolonging themselves permanently in our—and in the earth's—consciousness. First they are barely listed (sixty-three saints, and nine saintly groups) with a brilliant brevity and haunting reverberation in Sundarar's 'Tiruthondar Thokai'; then the sixty-three are more elaborately described in Nambi-aandar-Nambi's 'Tiruthondar Tiruvandadi' in eighty nine quatrains (as against Sundarar's eleven eight-line stanzas). And finally, the golden galaxy spreads to epic proportions in the 4286 stanzas of Sekkizhaar's Periyapuram. It is rather like three concentric and expanding universes, but Siva is at the centre, with the sixty-three (and, by implication, numberless other Bhaktas) orbiting and orchestrating the music of the marvellous divine-human relationship. The roll-calls of the devotees in all three recordations, although they follow neither a chronological nor an original nor any other obvious rule of arrangement, nevertheless seem to have their own compelling logic in the heaving poetic spans of Sundarar, Nambi-aandar-Nambi and Sekkizhaar.

In the present interpretative study, however, Thiru Vanmikanathan has ventured to impose on the narrative an order of his own. After a preamble in which the fisher-man devotee, Adipatthar raises the curtain, long chapters are devoted in part-I to Sundarar, (The Lord's Companion), Tirugnaana Sambandhar (the Lord's Son), Appar (the Lord's Serviteur), and Tirumoolar the Gnani who knows and lives his identity with God. For these four 'vocal' devotees, singing in praise of the Lord is love-abounding, joy-abiding, and stainless Karma, all in one. Sundarar, Sambandar, Appar and Tirumoolar, these saintly four loom immense as the poet protagonists of the unfolding drama of devotion enacted in Periyapuram.

The problem, then , is with the emaining nearly sixty saints, each his (or her) own infinity. It is here that G.V. Pillay has boldly tried to apply his new grammar of classification. Part II is thus

entitled 'Applied Siva-Gnaana-Bodham', and the saints' lives and ministry are made to exemplify with overwhelming force the diverse specifications in the Twelfth Sutra in 'Siva-Gnaana-Bodham'.

(Through the help of Gnosis)
 God rid of that (Anava) Malam
 which prevents You
 from uniting with the lovely lotus-like
 yet strong feet of the Lord;
 fraternise with the Lord's devotees
 (who have apprehended Reality)
 and worship the guise of those
 who, to the detriment of delusion,
 are filled with 'Gneyam'
 (that which ought to be known: Reality)
 and the Temple
 as verily Haran Himself.

Seven of the sixty-three (including Sirrutthondar) graduate in sainthood by cleansing their obscurely yet tenaciously clinging taints (the ego's kick-back, the Karmic self-shackling, the forging of fetters by Maya). And although, taken at their face value, incidents like one saint surrendering or sacrificing his wife, another his daughter's ravishing tresses, a third weighing in the balance himself and his all for redeeming a promise or fulfilling a duty, may seem something like devotional 'overkill' today, the principle sought to be illustrated and established is surely this: in the mysterious calculus of God-love, there can be no second to the Divine, and all is resolved and redeemed in the burning brazier of His Grace. Aside from the paramount need for the rejection of 'taints' (i.e. of the mere mind's adhesions and preferences, the vital's demands and desires, and the body's reticences and revulsions), there is the 'positive' good to be gained from Satsang, consorting with the elect like Sundarar, or Sambandar or Appar, and this is exemplified in the lives of Gananatha and other Nayanars. And of course the true Bhakta stationed in God can have no fear of 'death', and this faith has sustained men of religion the world over to face the worst of persecutions and come safely through. Suffering is often the badge of the devotee's life, and as Abdul Baha (Baha Ullah's son), who spent most of his life in prison, told Mirra Richard (later the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram), people who suffer for their

religious faith "have always felt a kind of Divine Grace helping them."

But the House of Devotion has many mansions, some arresting the eyes at once, some hidden in the interior spaces. Quite a few of the Nayanars (Ilayangudi Marar, Moorkha and Nesa, for example) made the regular reverent feeding of devotees the well trodden pathway to God. There were, then, the Temple Builders, and some built visible architectural marvels, and some like the gloried Pusalar and Vayilar in the inner plateaus of the mind, heart and soul. There were also the paragons of obscurity who were content to perform with meticulous punctuality simple acts of service like mending the Temple Tank, providing oil for the Temple Lamp by selling grass, or offering garlands, frankincense or sandal paste for the service of the Lord. The names of these saints, too, shine with undiminished lustre in Sekkizhaar's luminous pages. Unlike these 'Sattvik' devotees, there were the 'rajasic' ones also, the 'fanatic' or violent ones; one cut off his father's irreverent leg, another his wife's hand, a third the tongues of the blasphemous, and yet another an offending nose!

Even as all roads lead to Thillai or Kashi (or to Rome, or Mecca), numberless are the pathways to the Lord. Right ardour and aspiration, rejection of the false, seeking the company of His devotees and basking in their fellowship, and making temple-service—music, mantric chants, or any service however supposedly 'mean', an apt form of worship for the nonce, and aye, meeting Him face to face!—offering mangoes to Him, as Karaikkal Ammayar did, or 'an eye for an eye' as Kannappar did, or himself—body and soul—as did Nandanar; and all roads indeed can lead to the Divine. And there were the Tamil saints beyond the limits of the Tamil country, for the Divine's citizenship is coterminous with the cosmos and the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere.

While the categorisation of the sixty-three under 'companions', 'sons' and 'serviteurs' or under the diverse interlocking clauses of the twelfth of Meikkandar's Sutras confers an immediate advantage on the reader who desires initiation into the Periyapuram world, presently the phenomenon of Bhakti is seen to blur and transcend

all constricting boundaries. This is whole, that is whole, this minus that is whole, this multiplied or divided by that is still whole—for all is the Love Divine, and such Love is not Love if it can permit the intrusion of the weights and measures of the market place. A little while, and one feels divorced from the Divine; and a little while, there is the rendition of the veil of separation, and the river is well lost in the sea. We inhabit a ‘bootstrap’ universe that’s an intricate web of interpenetrating relationships, and the purgative-illuminative-unitive steps of ascent and the serviteur-son-companion classification are both gathered in the triune unity of Karma-jnana-bhakti. Sambandhar died as a boy of 16, Sundarar when he was 18, and Appar when past eighty. Kannappar of Kalahasti was the ancient among the sixty-three, and Sundarar was the most recent. But these ‘facts’ mean nothing. The sixty-three were infinities scooped out of the Infinity, and hallowed be their Names!

With a two part structure neat and logical as above indicated, Thiru Vanmikanathan’s scholarship, commitment, linguistic resilience and expository expertise feel free to present Sekkizhaar in insightful translation and interpretation. A 1000 year period is the time span, and all Tamil Nadu (and beyond) is the theatre of action, and infinitely varied is the play of chance and change, of emotion and memory, of aspiration and realisation. Understandably enough, Sundarar and Sambandhar, Appar and Tirumoolar, fill a large space, but the others too—each with his own autonomy and his sovereignty of love of Siva—reign in their respective territories. What a divine-human drama, what a heaven-earth concord! For a guide-map, one might use S. Shivapada Sundaram’s “In the steps of Sekkizhaar: A Pilgrim’s Progress” (1978). And so, shuttling between Sekkizhaar’s images of devotion and poetic iridescences on the one hand and G.V. Pillay’s elucidations and ‘transcreations’ on the other, the reader is taken through a masterate course in the Love-Divine, the Love of Siva, the anatomy of Bhakti, the ecology of Faith, and the inscrutable ways of the Ordainer and ‘the mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven.’

Not the least of the attractions of Thiru Vanmikanathan’s book is of course the verse renderings of about 800 stanzas from the original Tamil. G.V. Pillay is an old war horse in the art and

science of Translation, and in his 'Grammar of Translation' he agrees with J. W. McFarlane's view that a good translation is "making something" that is

recognisably a translation
and not a 'free rendering' or 'adaptation'...
and yet, at the same time,
making the lines 'sayable'.

All translation is treachery, say some, but no translation is necessary bridge-building. Competent translation of poetry plays the good broker between the reader and the original, and surpassing the mere prose of statement, gives intimations of the poetic reverberations; it inspires trust as well as stimulates continuing interest. And G.V. Pillay's renderings are certainly close to the original, and are 'sayable' and enjoyable as well. Here for example, the three-year old Sambandhar's celebrated salutation to the Lord:

Behold Him
with an ear having a plug of rolled palmyra leaf
stuck in its pierced lobe,
the Rider on the bull,
the Wearer of pure white moon on his locks,
the one smeared
with the hot ashes of the cremation ground
all over His body,
the Stealer of my heart...

And this, from Sundarar:

Piththa! Pirai-choodi!
O Crazy One: O crescent-moon-adorned One!
O Great Lord! O Dispenser of Grace!
You have installed Yourself
in the mind of mine.....

And this, about the meeting between Appar (Thirunavukk-Arasu) and Sambandar:

On Arasu, who was approaching
with palms joined in obeisance,
passing with heart melting with love
through the throngs of devotees,
and prostrating at the feet of Sambandar
with unstinting great love,

Sambandar.....took hold of the hands of him
 who humbly prostrated at his feet,
 lifted him up ...and paid obeisance to him,
 and hailed him 'Appare!' 'O Daddy!'
 Appar in return exclaimed:
 'Your obedient servant!'

Whether episodic, descriptive, evocative, exhortatory or philosophic, the rendering makes a laudable attempt to convey the sense and emotive quality of the original. In the commerce of translation from Tamil to English, there is seldom total correspondence or identity between word and word, and the translator must needs sway between the too strong and the too weak 'equivalent'. At best it is a 'thankless' task, but G.V. Pillay—I venture to say—has done a good job on the whole.

For the rest, 'The Condensed English Version of Periyapuram' has the same weight and varied richness of the earlier work on Saint Ramalingar. Thiru Vanmikanathan's extensive reading and uncanny memory forge similitudes between Western and Indian mysticism; there are suggestive comparisons like the one between Sambandar and Adi Sankara, or between Appar and Sambandar and John the Baptist and Christ. The citations at the appropriate places from the poets, thinkers and writers of all time give the work a global sweep, and we encounter names as varied as Rama-krishna, Vivekananda, Thomas a Kempis, Thoreau, Dag Hammarskjold, Thomas Merton, Robert Frost, Jerome K. Jerome, Aldous Huxley, Kahlil Gibran, Shakespeare, George Trevelyan, John Doane, as well as noted Tamil Scholars like C.K. Subramania Mudaliyar. We are not required to accept all G.V. Pillay's opinions or all the minutiae of his translations. The volume is now and then interspersed with G. V. Pillay's *obiter dicta* which add spice to the narrative, but they too need not necessarily receive the reader's endorsement. What G.V. Pillay's book really does is to launch the interested reader into the ocean immensity of Periyapuram and the beneficiary must feel duly and profoundly grateful. 'The Condensed English Version of Periyapuram' is also a Testament in its own right, for it presents Sehkizhaar as the great laureate of the sixty three Tamil saints, and as a universalist whose contemporaneity cannot be missed, as for example, when G. V. Pillay sums up

Appar's message "to our world opening its morning paper with trepidation" as fearlessness, faith, wealth of voluntary poverty, service and humility. G.V. Pillay places us all in his debt with his 'Pathway to God' series, and I can conclude only by praying that he will yet complete by Grace of the Divine the Agenda he announced in his 1971 'Preamble' to the Tiruvachakam volume, and give us his interpretative and educative studies of Thayumanavar, the Siddhars and the Alwars as well.

It is from the givers we ask for more,
for bounty sustains itself;
it's the wish-fulfilling Tree in the Grove
that claims out supplication.

'Sydney House'
277-B, J.J. Road,
Madras-600 018.
Dated 15th March 1984.

K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR.

PREAMBLE (i)

Between The *Thiruvachakam*, which I, on the basis of Maraimai-lai-adigal's vast research, place in the 3rd Century B.C., and the *Thiruvarutpa* of Ramalinga Swamigal of the 18th—19th Century, there exists a voluminous devotional literature in Tamil which is a record of the pathway to God trod by the mystics, saints and devotees of Tamil Nadu.

These are the Twelve *Thirumurais* the sacred compilations, the *Divya-p-Prabandham*, and the songs of Thayumanavar. I propose to restrict myself to the *Thirumurais*. Among them, chiefly to the first seven. They are the hymns sung by Saint Thirugnanasambandhar (1st to the 3rd), Saint Thirunavukkarasar (4th to the 6th), and Sundaramoorthi Swamikal (7th). The twelfth is a hagiography of sixtythree saints of Tamilnadu who lived from the B.C.'s to the ninth century A:C.

In terms of personalities, this work will cover all the sixty three saints in the Twelfth *Thirumurai*, the hagiography of Saints by Sekkizhar. In terms of hymns and poems, the twelve *Thirumurais* contain more than eighteen thousand stanzas, the outpourings of twenty-six persons. These may be called the vocal devotees.

Aldous Huxley, writing in his Introduction to his 'Perennial Philosophy', observes:

The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things, lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and pure in spirit. But in every age, there have been some men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences.

The twenty-six devotees are some of the few who "have left accounts of the Reality they were enabled to apprehend." As against these few 'vocal' devotees who span the vast period of time between the 3rd century A.C., and the 19th century A.C., there must have been and have actually been hundreds of 'dumb' devotees no less in merit than the twenty-six. But apart from the *Periya-puranam* and the Twelve *Thirumurais*, we have no record to help us to know who they are. But the *Periya-puranam* by Sekkizhar gives us information about sixty-three devotees only, of whom the major four are Thirugnanasambandhar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, and Thirumoolar, the author of the 10th *Thirumurai*. These four account for one half of the output of the songs in the *Thirumurais*. Of the remaining fifty-nine, three have left records of their quest of God. These are Karaikal Ammaiyan, Aiyadigal-Kadavar-kon, and Ceraman-perumal-nayanan. For the rest fifty-six, whom we may call the 'dumb' devotees, we have to rely on Sekkizhar only who has left vivid pen-pictures of their lives in enthralling verses. This book will, therefore, deal with these fifty-six dumb devotees as well. Such is the scope of this work.

The task is formidable and frightening. In one sense, however, the work has been made easy by the two Pathway books which have preceded this work, namely, *Pathway to God through the Thiruvachakam* and *Pathway to God Trod by Ramalinga Swamigal*. Even without this book, those two works alone would suffice to show the research scholar and the devotee, the *Pathway to God* hewn, step by step, by the mystics of Tamilnadu. But those two books show us only the *Pathway trod* by no more than two mystics. Whereas this work will show how sixty-three mystics trod, it is true, the same *Pathway*, but each doing it in his own characteristic way. The *Pathway trodden* is the same, it is the *Pathway of devotion to God*, of love and service to fellow-men, but each of the sixty-three saints covered by this book makes the journey in his own fashion, making it look as if it is a unique manner of treading the Path

As our work will be based mainly on the *Periya-puranam*, it is proper that we spend some time in getting acquainted with the characteristics of this hagiography. The source work, or to put it correctly, the inspiration for this hagiography is a song of eleven stanzas sung by Sundaramoorthi Swamigal. How he came to

sing this song is quite interesting. Once, he was hurrying along to worship Lord Civan, going under the name of *Thiyaagaraajar*, in the temple at Thiruvaaroor. As he crossed the threshold of the entrance in the southern boundary wall, he cast a glance at the devotees assembled in the *Devaasiriyan*.¹ a many-pillared hall, situated at the other end, right opposite the entrance by which he came in, and proceeded on his way, wondering when he would be made a slave unto them. Sekkizhar relates this incident thus:

Apart from the heaven-dwellers,
countless devotees of great fame on earth
were assembled in the hall called 'Devaasiriyan'
in the temple of the Lord
with an eye on the forehead.
Sundarar, musing within himself,
"Which will be the day when I will be made
a slave unto these,"
went on his way,
singing the praises of the feet of the Supreme.

335-T-189²

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*

Viranmendar, a great devotee of Lord Civan, a personality as rugged as the hilly country he hailed from, who was present at that time in the *Devaasiriyan*, unable to see what passed in the mind of Sundarar, only saw him pass by the devotees without

1. The 'Devaasiriyan' is a hall situated right opposite the entrance in the southern wall encircling the temple of Vanmeekanaathar and *Thiyaagaraajar* at Thiruvaaroor. It is a structure of cut stone masonry, 206 feet and 6 inches in length and 123 feet and 6 inches in width. As many as 462 stone pillars, each 9 feet high, support the roof.

Its floor is 2 feet and 6 inches above the ground level. A few steps lead to a portico 37 feet 6 inches long and 24 feet 6 inches wide. From this point the main hall begins. A Passage, 9½ feet in width, leads up to a little over one-third of the length of the hall when it expands to a passage 21 feet in width flanked on either side by nine ornamental cut-stone pillars till it reaches a dais, 2 feet above the floor-level of the hall, 43 feet 6 inches wide and 57 feet 9 inches long, at the northern end. This has steps on all sides except the northern end. At the northernmost end of this dais, is a small niche which houses an image of Ganapati. This dais is called the 'aasthaana-mandapam.' Here, one imagines, sat the elite of the devotees, while the whole hall thronged with the rest of them.

2. 335-T 189. The first number is the continuous serial number of the stanza in the Periya-puranaam. The second number without any

paying homage to them. He became very annoyed at what he considered a serious act of disrespect. And he was rightly annoyed too. For does not the *Civagnanabodham*, the basic scripture of *Caiva Siddhantha*, aver thus in its twelfth aphorism?

Wipe out that *malam*³
which prevents you from reaching those stronghold—
the pink lotus-like feet of the Lord;
associate with devotees who have apprehended the God-
head;
and worship verily as Haran Himself
the guise of those who,
to the detriment of illusion,
are filled with '*Gneyam*'—
that is, the Being who is to be known—
and the temple of God.

* * *

The devotee is to be worshipped as Haran, that is, Lord Civan Himself. In fact, the devotee is entitled to greater respect and service than God.

It is not only in Tamilnadu that this view is held; the belief prevails all over India, nay, it may be said to prevail in all the eastern countries.

For Jesus, an Easterner, had also said, addressing the people:
Verily, I say unto you, in as much you have done it (fed,

letter prefix is the number of the stanza in the chronicle (*Puranam*) of a particular saint. The letter 'T' or 'E' or 'K' or 'V' prefixed to a number in some cases stands for 'Thaduththu-aat-konda-puranam', 'Eyar-kon-kalikkaamanaar-puranam, Kazharritra-rrivar-puranam, Vellaanai-sarukkam respectively in the case of Life of Sundaramoorthi Swamigal whose life is treated in the above chronicles of puranams.

3. 'malam'—a taint which affects the soul like verdigris on copper. Malam-s, according to Caiva-Siddhaantha Philosophy are three. They are Aanavam—ignorance—karma (the fruit of good and bad deeds which accompanies a soul birth after birth on earth), and 'Maayaai' (matter from which God creates the bodies of creatures and the worlds). All these, according to Caiva-Siddhaantha, are beginningless and eternal, and coeval with God. Aanavam, without straining the comparison too much, may be compared to the 'Original Sin' of Christianity. Though all three are called Malam-s or taints, it is Aanavam alone which holds back a soul from progressing towards Godhead and Mukti—release from the cycle of deaths and births. The other two, in fact, are used by God to release the soul from the grip of Aanavam.

clothed, quenched the thirst, tended in illness, visited in misery) unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

And Abu Ben Adhem, a character in an English poem, said to the angel who had told him that his name was not in the list of those who loved the Lord:

"I pray thee, then,
write me as one who loves his fellowmen."

And, lo!, when on the next night, the angel showed him the names of those whom love of God had blessed, his name led all the rest.

The saints of Tamilnadu never asked God for a favour.⁴ They did not even pray for *mukti*. On this account there prevails a phrase in Tamil, namely, '*reedum venda viralinar*', people of the repute of not wanting even *mukti*. But they prayed for admission to the galaxy of devotees. They held this as the highest reward of devotion to God. Such an admission was tantamount to conferment of *mukti* even while alive in this world. Sri C.K. Subrahmaniya Mudaliyar, the great commentator on Sekkizhar's *Periya-puranam*, observes: "Joining the galaxy of devotees is the blessing mentioned in *Caiira-Siddhaantha* as the blessing gained by worship of Lord Civan." Maanikkavachakar, one of the four *samaya-kuravars*, Fathers of the Faith, (the others being Thirugnanasambandhar, Thirunavukkarasar and Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, prayed for the privilege of admission to the galaxy of devotees in the beginning, middle, and end; in fact, throughout the whole of his famous work, *The Thiruvachakam*, the Handbook of Mystical Theology. He sang in the very first poem:

Rid me (of the cycle of births)
and induct me into the fold of Your devotees.

And in the 21st decad, he prayed:

O our Primal Lord Whose being knows no end,
and Who dwells in the sacred Golden Hall!
The Mistress dwells in midmos: of You,
in the Mistress centred You dwell,
if in the core of me, Your servant,

4. When I say this, I have not forgotten the numerous requests Sundaramoorthi Swamikal made for gold, paddy, clothes etc.

both of You indeed dwell,
come forward and bestow on me, Your servant,
the gracious privilege
of abiding amidst Your servants
that my heart's purpose be fulfilled.

* * *

His prayer was granted, for he has sung in the 26th decad of his work thus:

We witnessed the mystic event of my Father
of peerless, simile-transcending, resplendent,
blossom - like holy feet
enslaving me and initiating me
into His band of devotees!

* * *

This theme pervades nine out of ten stanzas of the decad.

The devotees assembled in the *Devaasiriyan* were, perhaps, the devotees whom Maanikkavaachakar had in mind when he declared, "We witnessed the mystic event of my Father enslaving me and initiating me into His band of devotees." Viranmindanayanar, therefore, was justifiably annoyed at Sundarar passing by the *Devaasiriyan* without paying homage to the devotees assembled therein. Sundarar however, unmindful of the criticism he had invited, went on his way to the sanctum-sanctorum of *Vanmee-kanaathar*, the Lord abiding in the anthill. The Lord desirous of bestowing the boon craved by him who was now worshipping him with welling love, Himself extolled the Glory of the Galaxy of Devotees abiding in the *Devaasiriyan*, and bade Sundarar go and worship them. Furthermore, he made him sing their praises in faultless Tamil.

Bid thus, Sundarar went towards the saints, prostrating himself several times even from afar. On arriving near them, he addressed each one of them and sang his famous *Thiruth-thondai-thokai*, a Catalogue of the Holy Servitors of the Lord.

In this Catalogue, he included certain mystics, saints, and devotees of his own time and of several centuries before him, on whom the gracious eye of Dame Fortune had fallen, and whose names had, therefore, come down the ages in the lore of the country. For, it is obvious that Tamilnadu, the cradle of the cult of devotion, could not have produced sixty-three saints only in the course of a thousand years or more. For each one of the sixty-

three saints, there must have been scores, no less in merit than them, but who, like the flowers in the words of the Poet Thomas Grey, were born to blush unseen and to remain unsung.

Nambi-andar-nambi of the eleventh century, the discoverer and compiler of the *Thirumurais*, elaborated Sundarar's poem and sang a poem of eighty-nine stanzas. But Sekkizhar took as his basis Sundarar's song, though sometimes he weaves into his own poems phrases from Nambi-andar-nambi's poem.

Each line, or, as in a few cases, a set of lines of Sundarar have been elaborated by Sekkizhar into hundreds of stanzas, and, in one case, a line and a half have been elaborated to a biography of 1256 stanzas. The biographies are the result of great painstaking research which has been substantiated in recent times by discoveries of epigraphical finds on stone or copper plates. One may dare say that there is no other similar work so historical in character, so accurate in topography, so enlightening on the economic, cultural, religious, and sociological life prevailing at the time of the several saints, so singularly free from flights of imagination, fable and legend which usually mar the biographies of saints in other works in India or elsewhere. Whether it is a vignette of only one stanza or an elaborate biography of over a thousand stanzas, each biography is characterised by a vividness that compels belief.

If the *Periya-puranam* was only a hagiography, of whatever merit it may be, it would not command the kind of study by the learned and the laymen alike as it actually does. But it is a revolutionary work in more than one sense. Let us examine its characteristics one by one.

As a country in the olden days was composed principally of several villages, the village was the self-sufficient unit of a country. The self-sufficiency of a village in India, and perhaps of all countries, was something unique. At the bottom of the structure of the community life in an Indian village was the *Pulayan*, a person who, according to Saint Thirunavukkarasar, though he is one who eats the offal of a dead cow, is worthy of worship as God if he is a devotee of Lord Civan. Others in the structure were the hunter, the fisherman, the potter, the weaver, the washerman, the barber cum physician and surgeon, the toddy-tapper, the oil-monger, the grocer or the merchant, the cowherd, the carpenter, the blacksmith,

the farmer, the temple priest, the *Vedic* brahmin, the Chieftain, and the king. All these categories of a village community except a carpenter and a blacksmith are represented in the *Periya-puranam*. The crafts of six of the saints are not given by Sekkizhar in his work. They are Eripaththar, Kanampullar, Kariyar, Kulachchiraiyar, Peru-mizhalai-k-kurrumbar, and Thandi-adigal. Thandiatigal was a blind-man from birth, and therefore, was not plying any craft. Kariyar was a poet. Kanampullar was a rich merchant who had fallen on evil days. He should have been classified as a *vanikar*, a merchant. Kulachchiraiyar was the Chief Minister of a *Pandian* King, and, therefore, would have been a *velaalar*. Peru-mizhalai-k-kurrumbar was a petty-chieftain. This leaves only Eripaththar who could have been a blacksmith. He could well have been one. Perhaps, he forged his own hatchet with which he hacked down the elephant of the king. Perhaps, he followed the profession of a carpenter as well.

In writing the chronicles of the saints, Sekkizhar was not giving the it castes but the crafts they followed to earn their livelihood, the crafts which also served as their means of service. In no more than two cases out of the sixty-three does Sekkizhar use the name of a *Varna*. He uses the word 'soodra'. In the cases in which he used the word 'brahmin', he did not so much refer to the caste as to the craft the persons followed in their lives. That is, the discharge of the prescribed six duties—learning, teaching; performing sacrifices and conducting sacrifices on behalf of others; giving and receiving of gifts. It is a tragedy of our country that crafts became castes. It was a fossilization that took place because of troubled conditions in society. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Sundarar when he sang the *Thiru-th-thonda-th-thokai* and Sekkizhar when he wrote his *Periya-puranam*, both proclaimed the greatest truth, that is, that everyone irrespective of caste or craft is entitled to gain *mukti*, freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. When Saint Manikkavachakar sang "Behold *Eesan*, whom everyone is entitled to apprehend," he was uttering a phrase which is the keynote of the *Periya-puranam*. It is the first and foremost characteristic of the *Periya-puranam*. Country, creed, craft, caste, sex, language—nothing is a bar to a person apprehending the Godhead.

Love, creature-oriented and creator-oriented, is the only

qualification required of an aspirant for *mukti*. It must be total love, selflesslove—a love which opens the gates of salvation to any one irrespective of one's birth in any caste or community.

The second characteristic of the *Periya-puranam*, or, rather, of the saints whose lives are chronicled in the *Periya-puranam*, is that all of them were householders. They were married men with wives and children. In the case of twenty saints, the chronicles make special mention of their married state. In the case of others, this can be inferred from the particulars of the lives of the saints. When the chronicles of each of the saints will be dealt with further down in this book, this aspect of the lives of the saints will be highlighted. All of them had occupations of their own which served as means of their livelihood, and, what is more unique about them, as means of service as well. Again, when we come to deal with the chronicle of each of the saints, we shall notice this aspect with special attention, but now it will suffice to give one or two instances. The very first saint mentioned in Sundarar's Calendar of Saints, Thiruneelakanta-k-kuyavanar—Thiruneelakan-dar the Potter—baked pots and pans for sale to provide him a living, and, at the same time, baked alms-bowls to give away to devotees. This was the form, his desire to do service to fellowmen took. Thiruk-kurippu-th-thondar was a washerman. He laundered clothes for his living. He washed clothes of devotees free of any charge and thus served his fellowmen.

All the saints chronicled in the *Periya-puranam* were ascetics. Usually we identify ascetism with certain external marks and ways of life. No doubt, ascetism means renunciation. But what these saints renounced was not their kith and kin, their hut or hamlet, or their locks, or their occupations. What they gave up was meat, anger theft, killing, pride, hurting others, conduct not becoming a righteous man. Attachment and desire were two other things they renounced. What they donned was not external clothing of ochre cloth. They were qualities of the heart. What they donned were not externals. They donned truthfulness, *ahimsa* (not hurting any creature), cheerful endurance of privations, austerity of life. In the externals they were no different in appearance than their neighbours, they were householders like the rest of the people in their village. In heart, they were ascetics. In thought, word, and deed they were ascetics. They were ascetics according to the

age-old Tamil traditions. They were the ascetics who were portrayed by Thiruvalluvar in his Section on Asceticism in his *Thirukkural*. This is the third characteristic of the saints portrayed in the *Periya-puranam*.

A century after Sekkizhar had created his masterpiece, Meikanda Thevar, the Codifier of the Principles of *Caiva Siddhantha*, cast as the crowning *sooktham*—aphorism—of his *Ciragnana Bhodham* certain characteristics of saints whose lives have been chronicled by Sekkizhar in his *Periya-puranam*. He bade the *Caiva Siddhanthis* thus:

Wash out the taint
which prevents you from embracing the feet of the Lord
tender like the rosy lotus;
consort with devotees
who have gained apprehension of the Godhead,
and worship the form of those
who are free from delusion
and are filled with the Being Who is to be known,
and the Temple as well as *Haran* (i.e. Civan) Himself.

* * *

No other than Lord Civan Himself had said about the devotees thus:

Shortcomings they have none.

These sixty-three saints had washed out the *malam*, the taint which would prevent one from embracing the feet of the Lord. And they consorted with other devotees. In fact, the privilege of consorting with other devotees was their only wish, was their only prayer to God. And they worshipped devotees as verily Lord Civan Himself. When they did not worship the devotees themselves as *Haran* i.e. Civan Himself, they worshipped the temple of Lord Civan as the Lord Himself. Service of every kind, from sweeping the premises and keeping it free of dirt and weeds, to the providing of oil for the lamps of the temple, to the providing of wicks for those lamps, to the providing of incense, all these and more services were the forms the worship of the temple as *Haran* Himself took. And the direct worship of the *Lingam*, i.e., of *Haran*, was done by some of the devotees. But with the Lord, worship of the devotees and worship of the temple, both counted as worship of Himself. This is the fourth characteristic of the saints whose lives are chronicled in the *Periya-puranam*.

We saw that several of the saints out of the sixty-three were not from the high castes. In fact, some of them belonged to what are called the low castes. Quite a large number of them were not highly educated, some must have been totally illiterate. We cannot say that all of them were vegetarians. One of them was a hunter who killed a boar and roasted the carcass, and, not only fed on the flesh, but offered the flesh as fitting food for Lord Civan Himself. Another was a fisherman. A third was a *pulayan*, the staple diet of whose caste was the flesh of dead cows. None of them ever performed any austerities of the *Hatayoga* type. Don't remind me of Thirumoolar. For all appearances, they were just ordinary householders. According to the notions commonly prevailing today, none of them did anything special to qualify for *mukti*. And yet, the chronicles leave us in no doubt that all the sixty-three saints gained *mukti*—freedom from the cycle of deaths and births. How did they gain such a *mukti*? By LOVE. Love of God, love of His creation. We should not miss noticing an extraordinary feature of this qualification by which the saints of Tamilnadu gained *mukti*. It is not only an extraordinary feature, but a unique feature. This is a qualification which every human being can gain. No race-bar, no caste-bar, no literacy-bar, no wealth-bar, no sex-bar, no country-bar stands in the way of any human being gaining this unique qualification. It is, however, a love more than human, as Aldous Huxley puts it, because it is a total love which does not possess, nor is possessed. This is a love without reservations, a love which is worthy of merging in the Love which is God. Thirumoolar, one of the sixty-three saints, said "Love indeed is Civam"—that is, God. Thomas Merton, a mystic of this century, speaking of this merging of these two loves, says: "What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from Infinite Freedom, love identified with Love, not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love loving in Freedom."

True it is that this Love is not developed in one day. It is not developed in one life either. It takes several births to develop this kind of love, a love which makes a prisoner of God in one's heart. Manikkavachakar sang: "Behold God who falls into the net called Love." While it is admittedly a quality very difficult

to come by, it is the one quality any human being without exception can acquire. Sex, caste, creed, language, nationality, profession, poverty or wealth—nothing will stand in the way of a human being acquiring this qualification by which one can imprison God in one's heart. And this was the trap that every one of the sixty-three saints set down to capture God. This is the fifth and greatest characteristic of all the saints whose lives have been chronicled in the *Periya-puranam*. Without this characteristic, the first characteristic of the *Periya-puranam* becomes null and void. For, by no other means can any human being become entitled to apprehend God.

The sixth and final characteristic which distinguishes the saints whose lives have been chronicled in the *Periya-puranam* is that all of them without exception extirpated desire, tore it off, root and branch and roasted the seeds of the plant so that there might not be any further crop of that horrible weed.

If a *sloka* were to be composed to incorporate the qualifications which would have to be possessed by a person who aspires to gain *mukti* in the manner it was gained by the saints of the *Periya-puranam*, such a *sloka* would read thus:

Rare it is to be born as a human being,
 Rarer it is to lead a life of a householder as laid down
 in chapters five, six, and seven
 of the *Thirukkural*;
 Rarer still it is to be filled with love for kith and kin,
 for the neighbour,
 Rarer than that is to acquire the fifteen qualities from
 Hospitality to Giving as laid down in chapters nine
 to twenty-three of the *Thirukkural*;
 Rarer it is to develop charity in the heart—universal
 love, compassion to all creatures;
 Rarer indeed it is to give up meat eating, harming others,
 killing the creatures of God, and follow other virtues
 laid down in chapters twenty-six to thirty-five of the
 Thirukkural;
 Rarer than that is the apprehension of the Godhead,
 but rarest of all is the extirpation of DESIRE, root and
 branch.
 Hundreds of births it takes for a soul to qualify for *Mukti*
 thiswise.

* * *

Such will be the new *sloka*—a *sloka* whose clauses would be of universal practicability.

Such are the characteristics of the *Periya-puranam*. I dare say that no work of religious literature is so revolutionary in its outlook, nor does any other work of religious literature hold out to man the *mukti* so positively and assertively as the *Periya-puranam* does. Love God, serve mankind, give up attachments, *mukti* is yours.

As mentioned earlier, the *Periya-puranam* deals with the lives of sixty-three saints. In point of time, nine of them are before Thirugnanasambandhar, eleven are his contemporaries, twelve are contemporaries of Sundarar, and nothing certain could be said of the time of twenty-nine others. One of them, however namely, Kannappar, we may venture to think as belonging to the B.Cs.

In terms of territory, 32 belong to *Cholanadu*, the region ruled over by *Cola* kings. This territory corresponds principally to the present Thanjavur and Thiruchirapalli Districts. Eight belong to *Nadunadu*, literally, the Middle Country, something like the Middlesex Country in England. This region corresponds, principally, to what is modern South Arcot District of Tamilnadu. Seven come from *Thondanadu*, the present Madras City and its environs, and the Chingleput District. Four hail from *Pandinadu*. It will be more correct to say that four hail from Madurai, the capital of *Pandinadu*. Two come from the mountain country, the present Kerala, and one from *Kongunaadu* the present Coimbatore District. One each from *Konaadu* of the former princely State of Pudukkottai, and *Mazhanadu*, the fertile country above Tiruchirapalli on the northern bank of the River Cauvery. One comes from a remote place near Bellary which is now in Andhra Pradesh. The countries of origin of the rest are not known.

This topographical distribution offers intriguing material for study. Take, for instance, the devotees of Civan from *Pandinadu*. They are Nindra-seer-nedumarar, the hunchback *Pandiyan* King, the patron of Jainism, his queen, his chief minister, and an ancient king of that dynasty. The first three gain a place in Sundarar's *Thiruththondaththokai* as they were deeply involved in Thirugnanasambandhar's mission of combating Jainism in Tamilnadu, and the life of the fourth should have been a famed legend in the history of the dynasty of Nindra-seer-nedumarar.

In the case of the two devotees from the mountain country, present Kerala, both of them were deeply involved in the life of Sundarar, one, a *Cera* king, as his bosom friend, and the other as a stern critic. We must hold Viranmendar the critic as the greater of the two, for it was his stern criticism which made Sundarar sing the *Thiruththondaththokai* from which sprang the *Periya-puranam*. Moreover, it is clear from the chronicle of Virannendar in the *Periya-puranam* that it must have been Viranmendar who was responsible for the *Cera* King to hear about the greatness of Sundarar and rouse in him a desire to gain the friendship of Sundarar. For, Viranmendar hailed from Senkundroor, a celebrated town in the kingdom of the *Cera* king. It must have been through him only that the fame of Sundarar should have reached the ears of the *Cera* king.

In the case of the seven saints from *Nadunadu*, three are accounted for by Sundarar, his father and his mother, both of whom were presumably given a place in the Galaxy of Saints by Sekkizhar on the grounds of having begotten Sundarar even as Joseph and Mary have been given an honoured place in the Holy Bible and in the Calendar of Saints on account of being the parents of Lord Jesus Christ. Narasinga-munai-araiyar, a petty chieftain, was given a place on account of being the foster-father and patron of Sundarar. Of course, this is not the only claim of this chieftain for a place in the *Periya-puranam*. Of this later. The fifth, Thiruneelakantadyazh-p-panar gains a place by reason of his having accompanied Thirugnanasambandhar's singing on his *yaazh*, the lyre. Other two are Kalikkambar and Meipporul-nayanar. The eighth is Thirunavukkarasar. These three stand on their own merit.

It will be evident from the above analysis that *Paandinadu* and *Nadunadu* could not have produced just the too few saints and devotees in a matter of over a thousand years. The same can be said of *Konadu* and *Mazhanadu* which are represented by only one devotee each in the *Thiruththondaththokai*, and consequently in the *Periya-puranam*. Similarly, *Kongunadu* too is represented by only one devotee.

What is intriguing is that there seems to be a correspondence between these figures and the figures of the pilgrim centres of the

Caivite Faith in these same regions. The number of pilgrim centres are 191 in *Colanadu*, 32 in *Thondanadu*, 22 in *Nadunadu*, 14 in *Pandinadu*, one in *Malainadu*, that is, *Ceranadu*. *Kongunadu*, that is Coimbatore and the Nilgiri Districts, has seven pilgrimage centres, though that *nadu* is represented in, *Thiruththondaththokai* by only one devotee, namely, Kanampullar. Did the temples produce devotees?

In spite of this strange correspondence between the number of pilgrim centres and the number of devotees mentioned in the *Thiruththondaththokai*, we cannot escape the conclusion that this Calendar of Saints can by no means be a census of the devotees in the thousand and more years covered by that poem and consequently by the *Periya-puranam*. Similarly, the paucity of devotees mentioned by Sundarar in his poem in respect of any *Nadu* can be attributed only to his own lack of knowledge of the saints of that territory than to poverty of devotion of the people of that region to God. This will be particularly the case of *Nadunadu*, which produced two out of the four *Samayakurayars*, Fathers of the Faith, namely, *Thirumavukkarasar* and Sundarar. Sekkizhar himself echoes this thought in one of his songs in the biography of *Thirunavukkarasar*.

He sings:

If it has had the good fortune of Navukkarasar
who gave to the world
the blue-throated Lord's true righteous path
that the unrighteousness-begetting path may be replaced
and AalalaSundarar being born in it,
does it lie in my ability to sing the glory of world-famous
Thirumunaippadi?

1276-11

* * *

Thirumunaipadi is another name for *Nadunadu*.

Therefore, if only Sundarar had not been so young, not more than fifteen years, when he sang the Calendar of Saints, if only he had not been in such a hurry, if only he had not been obliged to sing the Calendar at the insistence of Viranmildar, if only his knowledge of the Saints of Tamilnadu had been more extensive, if only he had not sung it at the beginning of his extensive pilgrimage but had sung it much later when he had opportunity to visit the several Nadus, the Calendar of Saints would have included

perhaps, 630 devotees instead of 63, and the *Periya-puranam*, in consequence, would have been an epic of over 40,000 stanzas instead of 4,000 and odd. However, except in this respect a *Periya-puranam*, ten times the size of the present one, would not have added materially to our knowledge of the Pathway to God trod by the saints and devotees of Tamilnadu. We have not lost much by the small number of saints covered by the *Periya-puranam*.

But there is a sphere in which the *Thiruththondaththokai*, and, consequently the *Periya-puranam* fall short of fair representation. The number of women devotees included in the Calendar of Saints sung by Sundarar is only two, and Sekkizhar added one more, the mother of Sundarar, Isaignaniyar. To Karaikkal Ammaiyan whom Lord Civan Himself honoured with the loving epithet of "Ammaiye":—O Mother!—Sundarar spares just one word—*Peyar*, and to Mangayarkkarasiyar, the queen of Madurai, Sundarar has just two words to spare—*varivalai yaal maani*. But the *Periya-puranam* abounds with a large number of women who should have had a place in the Calendar of Saints. Sekkizhar leaves us in no doubt about all of them gaining *mukti*; Lord Civan did not exclude them from the privilege of *mukti*, though his Companion chose to deny them a place in his Calendar of Saints. When I come to deal with the chronicle of Karaikkaal Ammaiyan, I shall in my humble way try to make good the omission.

It has been said that the one and only path followed by the saints included in the *Thiruththondaththokai* was the path of love, *bhakti*, devotion. Thomas Merton calls it a love more than human. The quality and character of this love can be best described in the words of Kahlil Gibran, who, speaking of Love to the people of Orphalese said:

Like sheaves of corn, He (Love) gathers you to himself,
He threshes you to make you naked,
He sifts you to free you from your husks,
He grinds you to whiteness,
He kneads you until you are pliant,
And then He assigns you to His sacred fire
that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.
All these things shall love do unto you
that you may know the secrets of your heart,
and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart.



Though it is true that love alone is the only royal road to *mukti*, it manifested itself in diverse ways in the saints.

One survey analysis broadly classifies into three categories the devotees who gained *mukti* under the overall master-means of love. The analysis reports that twelve gained *mukti* through worshipping the Guru, nineteen through worship of and service to devotees, and thirty-two through worship of the *lingam*. This, however, is only a wide generalisation. When we come to examine the biography of each saint, we shall see the uniqueness of the act by which each gained *mukti*.

The acts are as varied as a devotee gouging out his eye and planting it in place of an eye of the idol of Civan which was bleeding profusely, to another who flung a stone daily at any *lingam* he happened to see on his way to take his food. Another manner of analysis shows us that seven sang the praises of God and gained *mukti*, seventeen performed righteous acts of violence, nine persisted in their mode of service or worship in spite of being overcome by poverty or age, three gave up their lives rather than give up their principles.

The acts which won *mukti*, the *mukti* which Adi Sankara Bhagavad Paadal speaks of, the *mukti* which releases a soul for ever from the cycle of births and deaths, such acts range from simple chanting of *Rudram*, a Sanskrit Garland of names of Civan, from playing the Mystic Five Letters, *Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya*—on the flute to self-immolation for love of God, from incessant mental prayer to feeding the devotees of God unceasingly in days of plenty and in days of poverty, from having the honour of being the parent of a devotee to the laying down of one's life rather than harm a devotee of Civan, be he even a crafty rogue in the guise of a devotee of Lord Civan, from singing thousands of songs in praise of Civan to the sacrificing of one's own son to Lord Civan who came in the guise of a devotee even as Abraham was ready to sacrifice his only son to the Lord, from raising seventy temples to Lord Civan to the using of one's own elbow in place of an unavailable piece of sandal-wood to be abraded on a stony surface into sandal paste for Civan's bath, from accompanying on a lyre the songs of Thirugnanasambandhar to the rewarding of a thief for stealing paddy from the public granary in order to feed devotees, from just being a servitor

to a servitor of the Lord to the punishing of others for offences against the Lord, from the commonplace to the sublime, from the ludicrous such as prostrating at the feet of a washerman whose body dust-laden as it was with fuller's earth, reminded one of a devotee with body dust-laden with sacred ash, to the heroic—the variety of criteria for *mukti* are as varied as the origin and lives of the saints. A great truth emerges from this kaleidoscopic variety of criteria. The Lord does not look into the act, but into the love behind it—even as Lord Sri Krishna accepted the sweat-soaked handful of parched rice from Kuchelar and showered fabulous wealth on the boyhood friend who was now a penurious father of twenty-seven children! Judged by the acts, we may question Lord Civan's discretion in conferring *mukti* on several of the saints. However, He did not go by the acts, but looked into the hearts of the devotees and found that the love throbbing therein was the same, no more, no less in any case.

Such is the greatness—the *mahaatmiyam*—of the chronicles recorded by Sekkizhar in the *Periya-puranam*.

PREAMBLE (II)

Civa-arpanam-asthu

"Let this be an offering to Lord Civan" was the way of life of a servitor, Athipaththar by name, fisherman by trade. He hailed from Naagaippattinam, a seacoast town of fluctuating prosperity in Thanjavoor District. In the days of Sekkizhar, this was a very prosperous town with ships arriving there laden with riches. Sekkizhar describes its prosperity thus:

It was filled with the tumult of its greatness;
to Holy Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, it was a
dwelling place;
greater than the ocean it was as it gave whatever was
desired for;
ships were ceaselessly pouring in elephants massive like
the waves,
cargoes of horses, gems, clothes. 3994-3.

* * *

Following a description of the colony of the fisherfolk of that port, Sekkizhar relates:

In a family of prosperous fisher-folk settled in that colony
was born Athipaththar, a great man,
who excelled in the act of rendering service
at the sacred feet of the Lord of locks
on which is worn a baby moon. 4000-9

* * *

There, that devotee was the head of the fisher folk. Sekkizhar continues:

Whenever among the catch of fish scooped by the nets
of the folk who prospered by the profession of killing
unlimited number of fish,
an outstanding fish was trapped,
saying: "This for our Lord, the Dancer,"
into the sea willingly released he with unremitting love. 4002-11

* * *

When thus he passed his days
releasing a fish,

"This for the anklet-girt feet of the only God",
 even if only one fish
 fell into the perfect net on a day,
 it happened that on many a succeeding day
 only one fish was got from the sea on which the cloud-
 waters fall.
 but he continued to release it in the sea. 4003-12

* * *

When for numerous days thus it happened,
 he had forgotten what it is to eat food;
 his body became weak;
 but in his duty unrelaxingly he stood.
 Understanding his quality,
 the Lord who dined on the poison
 dined on the nectar called his love. 4005-14.

* * *

On one of those days,
 even that single fish the Lord withheld.
 In its place He dropped into that net
 a fish of greatest value in all the world,
 a fish fash ned out of genuine gold of sheer sheen,
 and studded with is nine varieties
 of scintillating gems. 4006-16

* * *

When the indrawn net
 reached the shores of the wave-tossed sea,
 on seeing a world-wonder-exciting great radiance,
 as if a ruddy sun had arisen,
 someone who stood nearby took it up
 and said: "We have caught a fish." 4007-16

* * *

When others too said so,
 our servitor of waxing glory said:
 "This fish of shining gold and gems of nine varieties,
 by its form is a fish, but is otherwise different;
 this will be a fit offering to Him who has me as
 His slave;
 therefore let it go and arrive at His feet,"
 Saying so, he tossed it
 into the tossing waves of the sea. 4008-17.

* * *

Before the peerless true sacred servitor
 who cast off the great attachment—
 of which it is said:



He tossed the fish in to the tossing waves of the sea.

"The entire world is dependent on it"—
without even a trace adhering to him,
the Lord riding His bull
came in the sky, the home of clouds;
and
the Devas showered a rain of flowers.

4009-18.

* * *

The five kinds of musical instruments played.
The Lord of throat where dwells the poison
graciously bestowed "On Athipaththar,
who stood worshipping Him
with joined palms held over his head,
the privilege of arriving at *Civalokam*
and abiding with the devotees of great glory. 4010-19.

PART I

"To Us Indeed Are Songs Love-abounding.
a Splendid *Archana*—
(or mode of worship)"

—Lord Civan



A NOTE ON MUKTI¹

Theologians of our religion, *Sanatana Dharma*, have tried to divine and define *mukti*, release from the cycle of deaths and births. They classify *mukti* as *para-mukti* and *pada-mukti*—eternal *mukti*, and graded *mukti* or stages of *mukti*. *Pada-mukti* is also called '*Krama-mukti*'.

A soul on its journey to integration with the Godhead or Brahman, is born on earth again and again, and death after death takes a step forward on its journey. In the interval between a death and the next birth, it is said, that there is a time-gap, small or big. In this period, the soul is said to be in a stage of *pada-mukti*.

We know that all roads lead to Rome. Similarly, all roads in the spiritual world of man lead to God. Theologians will not be theologians if they did not claim special merits for the road of their making. On this favourite road of the theologians of *Sanatana Dharma*, they have set up four check-posts. They have divided the way of spiritual life which a soul treads on earth into four kinds, and to each kind of that life they have decided the kind of visa and permit to travel on their own brand of road to the kingdom of Heaven.

The way of spiritual life is accordingly divided into:

- (i) a life of a (menial) Servant of God,
- (ii) a life of a good Son of God,
- (iii) a life of a Companion of God,
- (iv) a life of a Knower of God.

These manners of living a life in relation to God are otherwise called:

- (i) *dasa-margam*,
- (ii) *sat-putra-margam*,
- (iii) *saha-margam*, and
- (iv) *gnana-margam*.

1. This note is placed here to enable the reader to understand the references to certain theological beliefs of *Sanatana Dharma* in the ensuing chapter, 'Companion of God.'

Theologians have defined the way in which each of the four kinds of lives has to be led. The *Civa-gnana-siddhiyaar*, the great canonical scripture of the *Caiva-Siddhantha System of Philosophy* describes them in detail. Of *dasa-margam*, which is called 'sariyai', (walking on the Pathway to God), it says:

Were I to define *dasa-margam*,
it is sweeping the floor of Sankaran's temple,
scrubbing it with cow-dung water,
plucking flowers and stringing
many garlands and chaplets for the Lord,
singing His praises,
lighting lamps in the temple,
maintaining a flower-garden
(for supply of flowers for the Lord's worship),
and, when coming across a person
in the holy guise of a devotee of Lord Civan,
enquiring of him,
"What is the kind of service I can do for you?",
and doing such services.

* * *

The *Pada-mukti* which the followers of the above path gain is called *Saloka*, inhabiting the same world as the Godhead.

About the *Sat-putra-margam*, The Pathway of the Good Son, (or *Kriyaa-margam*, that is to say, ritualistic worship). *Civa-gnana-Siddhiyar* says:

New fragrant flowers, incense, lamps,
materials for the bath of the Lord, offerings,
with these in hand, go to a suitable place,
clear the place by the five processes,
place a seat (for the God).
install the image of God thereon,
meditate on the form of Lord
and the light that is God,
invoke Him to descend and occupy the image,
worship Him with great devotion
with flower offerings, songs and obeisance,
perform with ardour the religious acts
associated with the sacrificial fire.
Those who do these acts daily
will abide by the side of the Lord.

* * *

The *krama-mukti* or *pada-mukti* which persons who follow the

kriya-margam attain is called '*Sameepam*', being close at hand to the Lord;.

Of the '*Saha-margam*'. The Path of the Companion of the Lord, the *Civa-gnana-siddhiyaar* says:

Saha-margam is,
 Being engaged in contemplation
 of the Whole Effulgence
 by the process of controlling the five senses,
 obstructing the flow of the two breaths,
 and bringing them to a state of stirlessness,
 gaining knowledge of the six centres (plexes, *Chakramis*),
 in the body,
 and understanding their deep significance,
 passing the *kundalini* through them to the top,
 namely the Centre, the *chakra*, of thousand petalled
 inverted lotus
 which is in the vertex of the head,
 partaking of the ambrosia
 from the region of the moon (within the head),
 and storing it up to the fullest extent in the body,
 and other acts—
 in short, going through all the eight phases of *yoga*.

* * *

The *krama-mukti* or *pada-mukti* which followers of this path attain is called '*Saqroopam* (gaining the same form as God)

Of the *San-margam*, the *Civa-gnana-siddhiyaar* says:

Sanmargam is,
 Learning all the arts,
 the *Puranas*, the *Vedas*,
 the *sastras*, philosophies, creeds etc;
 learning the contents of several religions from top to bottom
 knowing what is God,
 what are creatures, what the *malams* (taints),
 seeking the good path
 which discloses the transcendent Civan
 without any trace of any sense of separateness
 of Gnosis (*nanam*). The Being to be known (*neyam*)
 and the Knower (*nathru*).

* * *

The *mukti* gained by a follower of the *San-margam* is '*sayujya mukti*', eternal release from the bonds of death and births.

Civa-gnana-siddhiyar says thus in the context of these *margams* and the respective *muktis*:

*San-margam, saha-margam,
sat-putra-margam, dasa-margam,
to gain Sankaran, good paths four are these.
Gnanam, yoga, kriyai, sariyai,
thus also these are called.*

The *muktis* gained by these paths are of four kinds:
salokya, sameepya, saroopa, and sayujya.

The *mukti* gained by the aforesaid *gnanam*,
the learned say, is the final one.
The other three, they call *pada-mukti*.

* * *

In the seventh line of the above poem, the names of the kinds of *muktis* are in the reverse order. This is a common feature in Tamil prosody.

Let us remember that these theological dogmas are speculations, wise speculations, but nevertheless speculations. Speculations of very wise men, but men nevertheless. Therefore, let us not ask the question whether *Appar* as a follower of the *dasa-margam* would have gained *pada-mukthi* only, and, therefore, would have taken another birth or several more births. *Meignanis*, mystics are above the dogma of theologians.

1. GOD'S COMPANION

Beloved son of Sadayan and Isaignani—
who have sought refuge
in no less than the feet of Haran—
is Prince of Thirunaavaloor, *Aarooran*,
slave of the *Anmaan* in Aaroor.

—*Sundaramoorthi Swamigal*

Our Lord is indeed that *Aarooran*—
of the beautiful garland of lotus flowers
from which drips honey
to the sound of bees humming around—
who was sought out by that Effulgence—
difficult to gain by *Mal* and *Ayan*
in spite of their prayers and prostrations—
and was shown an ancient document written in Tamil.
and was told:
“Your entire Family are slaves unto Me,
come and serve Me!”

—*Nambi-andaar-nambi*

* * *

Our chiefest honour is the distinction
of leading our life contemplating him
and bearing on our head the feet of him who,
for the purpose of redeeming the world,
was enslaved by the munificent Lord—
impossible of being seen by lotus-seated

Brahma, or *Vishnu*—
through showing him an ancient document
at Vennainalloor, the cynosure of many.

550—*Amarneethi*. 49.

—*Sekkizhar*.

Thus sang Nambiandaar Nambi and Sekkizhar of Lord *Civan*
forbidding Sundaramoorthi Swamigal's wedding and of His enslaving
him. This is only a sequel to what happened in heaven a few years
ago. After death in a previous birth, Sundaramoorthi Swamikal
had gone to heaven and was a devotee close to the person of Lord
Civan. Then he was called *Aalasundarar*. Dag Hammarskjold
muses thus: “At high altitudes, a moment's indulgence may mean

death." Aalalasundarar was hurled from heaven to a life of birth and death on earth. Sekkizhar makes Upamanyu Muni relate the account of this fall in the Chapter on "The Glory of The Holy (Kailas) Mountain", the chapter with which his *Thiru-th-thondarpuranam* begins. One day, Upamanyu Muni, who was performing *thavam* at the foothills of Kailas, and his thousands of disciples saw a great beam of light streak across the sky. Everyone was amazed, and the disciples requested the Muni to explain the Effulgence. He replied, "The prince of Navaloor, The Obstreperous Devotee who had gone southwards is returning by the grace of our Father in Heaven." Saying which, with joined palms and streaming eyes, he followed the light with his eyes.

The puzzled devotees asked him for an explanation, and the Muni replied:

"There is a person
who hands to the True Being
the alluring sacred ash
and the garland of honey-laden flowers
which the True Being
with the flooding water-laden locks wears.
* * *

"His name is Aalalasundaran,
One day in the past
he entered the well-guarded flower-garden
to gather freshly-blossomed choice flowers
for adorning the Primeval Being.
* * *

There, before his coming, had come
hand-maidens of faces like the bright moon—
damsels of exuberant beauty—
to gather flowers suitable for the tresses
of native fragrance of the Consort of Civan
Who wields suzerainty over us.
* * *

Anindhithai of infinite charm
and Kamalini of extremely thick tresses, they were.
In the course of picking choice flowers
for their sacred purpose,
they came in sight of Aalalasundarar
as if it was by design of the Lord
of the heaven-dwellers.
* * *

That the Southern Region,
which had performed great *thavam*,
might Prosper,
and that the *Thiru-th-thonda-th-thohai*
might be bestowed on the world,
Aalalasundarar who was passing by
lost his heart to them:
the loved damsels too
diverted their attention to look at him.

31 to 35—The Glory of the Holy Mountain 21 to 25

* * *

And, later when Aalalasundarar had left
with the flowers he had picked,
and the swan-like damsels likewise had departed,
the Primordial Lord, seeing his state of mind, said:
“You have set your mind on the damsels;
therefore be born in the Southern Region,
and, after consorting with the delicate damsels
in the pleasures of love,
come back”

36—Idem 27

* * *

With palms joined in obeisance,
and deeply agitated,
he beseeched thus:
“When I, this mean wretch,
who is now leaving Your rosy feet,
and am on the point of becoming deluded,
when I am an illusion-chasing human being,
O my Leige-lord,
do graciously intervene,
and enslave me.”

36—Idem 28

* * *

And the Lord graciously agreed.

Upamanyu Muni concluded his tale saying, “Now he returns
after enjoying in the guise of a human being the company of the
damsels.”

There is nothing extraordinary in the fall of Aalalasundarar.
He had to be reborn on earth. Because, at the end of his last
life on earth, he had not gained *Paramukti*, but only *Padamukti*
or *Kramamukti* that is an intermediate stage of *mukti*, after enjoying
which Aalalasundarar, or, for that matter, any human being
had to be born. The *padamuktis* are three; *salokam*—being in
the same land as Lord Civan, *sameepam*—being in close attendance

on Lord Civan, *saroopam*—being in the same form as Lord Civan. Aalalasundarar was in the stage of *sameepa mukti*—an *anukkath-thondan*, a close attendant of Lord Civan.

"Despite studying many books on sublime subjects, one's own native intelligence will prevail."

said Thiruvalluvar. The native intelligence spoken of by the Sage of Mylapore is the *vaasanaa*, that is, proclivity, pre-disposition, propensity, proneness, tendency. In modern biological language it is called gene. To simplify the term, we may call it an ingrained habit¹ on instinct carried along by the soul from birth to birth. As a result of the working of this *vaasanaa*, Aalalasundarar gave rein to his roving eye. Straightaway, the law of *Karma* began to work, and he had to be born again on earth with the consequences of the roving eye as the *Prarabdha karma*. In this new life on earth, he had to work out this inherent instinct, and had to undergo all the travail of a bigamous man married to jealous wives, one of them a veritable gold-digger. God Almighty Himself could not have averted the rebirth, the bigamous marriage, the skin disease, the loss of eyesight, all a part of the divine plan to enable *Navaloorar*, the former Aalalasundarar, to wear out, to work out the instinct, to wipe it out without leaving any trace.

In the theology of *Sanatana Dharma*, in that of *Caiva Siddhantha*, God's grace does not take the form of absolution of all sins but it works through standing by a soul to bestow divine illumination, a knowledge into the working of the *Law of Karma*, by strengthening the latent will of the soul to surrender to the will of God, thereby extirpating the desire for the fruits of *Karma*, thereby severing the chain of births and rebirths. God does not absolve man from the effects of the fruits of *Karma*, but helps him to divest himself of the fruits of *Karma*, to act without desire for the fruits of action. *Karma* then becomes what may be called roasted seed-corn which cannot sprout to a seedling, water it as you may, and manure it as you like.

Aalalasundarar, expelled from the presence of Lord Civan, was born on earth in an *aadi-caiva* brahmin family as the son of Isaignani and Sadayan, residents of *Navaloor*, a prosperous village

1. A note on Karma and an essay called 'Making Habit Work For You' by William James will be found as appendices to this book.

in Munaippaadi Nadu, the kingdom of a petty chieftain. This kingdom is today a part of the South Arcot District of Tamilnadu. The child was named Nambiaroorar. If a student of the *Thirumurais*, an earnest student of the *Thiruththondar-puranam*, more popularly known as the *Periya-puranam*, is asked to give off-hand the names of the parents of Saint Thirugnanasambandhar or Saint Thirunavukkarasar or Saint Manikkavachakar, in all probability he will be unable to do so, or, at best, he will take quite a long time to recall the names to memory. But not so in the case of Nambiaroorar. He does not let us forget his parents. He has a habit of signing his decades with a stanza like this:

Rid of their miseries and sins will be those
 who could sing daily with devotion
 these set-to-music ten stanzas
 wrought by the skill of his tongue
 by Aarooran, Prince of Navaloor,
 youngster of amiable and good Sadayan and Isaignani,
 at Kalayanalloor on the southern bank
 of River Arisil of swoollen waters
 where abides He of the russet locks—
 which bear the cool waters and the silvery moon—
 the Transcendent Being Who wanders about
 singing in the *Kaamaram* tune before houses
 and begging His food
 with the skull of Brahma of the lotus flower
 as His begging bowl.

VII. 16-11.

* * *

In the above song as in several others, Nambiaroorar gives the names of both his parents, but in several more others he mentions the name of one or the other of his parents only. But such signature songs alone would not have imprinted on our minds the names of his parents. It was the signature song at the end of the *Thiruth-thondath-thokai*, a Calendar of the Saintly Servitors of God, which obliged Sekkizhar to include two chronicles on Nambiaroorar's parents in his hagiography, which chronicles all too brief though they are, never allow us to forget Nambiaroorar's parents Of Sadayanar, Sekkizhar concludes the previous chronicle thus:

Worshipping the lotus feet of Pananar,
 who by virtue of his past *Karma*,
 came to the position he attained,
 and taking leave of him,
 we proceed to relate the fame of Sadayanaar

of bees hovering garland,
 a brahmin of the Caiva Sect,
 a resident of *Naavaloor* of fertile fields of paddy and
 sugarcane.
 and the recipient of the grace of the Lord
 Who wears a budding moon and a serpent on His crown.

4226-69²-12

* * *

Saying so, Sekkizhar devotes just one stanza to Sadayanar.
 He sings:

Him, who by the grace of the Lord,
 gained the companionship of Our Lord,
 him, my liege Lord,
 who, by the grace of the Lord,
 bade the Lord Himself go as a mediator towards her,
 the flowery creeper
 which (in the past) had entwined itself .
 round his shoulders,
 him, the matchless friend of Ceraman Perumal,
 him, Nambiaroobar by name, he, Sadayanaar, begot
 that the people of the entire universe might prosper.

4227-1.

* * *

Just four lines and less than forty words in the original, but everything that need be said has been said. This stanza is a most unique and remarkable precis., a precis of no less than 840 stanzas of four lines each. Sekkizhar is at his best in this chronicle of one stanza.

Thiruvalluvar has a verse in his *Thirukkural*. It reads:

"The recompense that a son makes to his father is to make people exclaim:
 "What austerities did this man's father perform to beget such a son!" (70)

By this all too short one stanza, Sekkizhar makes us all exclaim,
 "What austerities did Sadayanar perform to beget such a son as Nambiaroobar."
 a son who gained the companionship of no other than Lord Civan Himself,
 a son who sent no other than Lord Civan Himself as a mediator in a love quarrel,
 a son who became the matchless friend of no less a person than the Cera king,

no less a person, not because he was the Cera King,
but because he was such a great devotee of Lord Civan
that the Lord graced the King's pooja
and performed His cosmic dance
that the devotee might hear the tinkling of the *cikambu*
on His feet.

Few Poets have ever been able to say so much in so few words.

In the chronicle of Isaignaniyar, the mother of Nambiaroorar, which follows, Sekkizhar has surpassed himself. Saying nothing much, he says a great lot in this chronicle of Isaignaniyar. He sings:

The rightful treasure of a venerable wife of Sadayanar
of undying fame,
gave birth to Nambi
Who was enslaved by the Lord
Who destroyed the indestructible fortresses
by just aiming an arrow at them.
Is it possible to praise by my wan words
Isaignaniyaar of the irreproachable clan?
Impossible for me! Impossible for anyone!

4228-1

* * *

Such were the parents of Nambiaroorar.

Nambiaroorar listed in his *Thokai* sixty names only; but since he would not allow Sekkizhar to forget him or his parents, Sekkizhar devoted to the biography of *Nambiaroorar* as many as four chronicles comprising 830 stanzas, and fourteen stanzas of one poem out of the Preface to the *Periya-puranam*. A total of 844 stanzas, the second largest number of stanzas devoted to any Saint, the largest number being reserved for Thirugnanasambandhar. It takes up one-third of the Puraanam. The biography of Nambiaroorar, sprawling over four chronicles and part of one song of the Preface, is one-fifth of the Puranam of 4281 stanzas.

Thaduththu-atkonda-puranam is the first of these four chronicles and comprises 203 stanzas. This work of mine is not concerned with the literary merits of Sekkizhar's *Periya-puramam*. Still, I must not omit to point out how swiftly Sekkizhar comes to the core of the subject of this particular Chronicle. The first stanza mentions the name—Thirumunaippaadi—of the country of the birth of Nambiaroorar. The second stanza mentions the village of his birth. The third mentions the occurrence of his birth, and the names of his parents. The fourth, the name of the child and his

boyhood. The fifth, the adoption of the child by the chieftain of the country, and the sixth, the up-bringing of the child in the chieftain's household, and his arriving at the marriageable age. Anyone attempting to do a precis of these six stanzas would be quite baffled. Let us make an attempt. Here it is. "An infant was born to Isaignani and Sadayanar of the village of Navaloor in the country of Thirumunaip-p-adi, and was named Nambiarooran. In his childhood, he was adopted by Narasingamunaiyar, the chieftain of Thirumunaippadi, and grew to marriageable age in his household." Forty-three words. But how bald and dry compared to the six poetry-laden stanzas of Sekkizhar.

This is as good a place as anywhere else to dwell on the extraordinary literary craftsmanship of Sekkizhar. I shall not be able to do so very often elsewhere in this work. I shall take these six stanzas for my purpose, and shall faithfully translate them.

Sekkizhar sings:

The country of origin of him
whom the beautiful-eyed Lord—
Who bears on His head
the River Ganges, the moon and the snake,
and the *kondrai* flowers—
enslaved by showing him a palm-leaf scroll is
Thirumunaippaadi Naadu
where dwell women with eyes like those of the red carp,
and which dart on either side of their cool moon-like faces
towards their ear-rings.

* * *

Thirunavaloor, where holy brahmins
of unswerving true way of life
have dwelt, since a long time,
is the flourishing town—

in the great holy country of waxing prosperity—
suitable for the incarnation (of Aalalasundarar)
by the grace of the Lord
that *Vedic Caivism* may reign supreme.

* * *

That the world may be rid of evil and be redeemed,
Aalalasundarar made his holy incarnation
in the womb of Isaignaniyaar—
a wife of flawless chastity—
as son to Sadayanar
of the clan of brahmins

who have been servitors
generation after generation
to the Lord with a Dame by His side.

* * *

By the grace of his Lord,
the child was named Nambiaroorar,
a name to which
even men of great *thavam* paid obeisance.
One day, when,
adorned by *aimpadai*, a talisman,
tinkling anklets, *sutti*,
a gem-set pendant for the forehead,
and a shining G-string
of woven gold strands round the waist,
he was trundling a toycart in the street.

* * *

The Chieftain of the country,
Narasinga Munaiyar by name, saw him,
and, with ineffable love welling up in his heart,
went to those who had borne the child,
and asked for the child
by right of friendship with them.
On getting the child,
he adopted him as a son
suitable to be the heir-apparent prince.

* * *

Even after adoption as the beloved son
of the great king,
the child was brought up
according to the parent's tradition,
and was invested with the sacred thread.
He explored all the ancient arts,
and, living in a luxury-laden style,
arrived at the age of marriage.

147 to 152-T. 1 to 9

* * *

In six steps Sekkizhar spans fourteen years of Nambiaroorar's life, covering step by step the country of his origin, the town of his birth, the purpose of his birth and the family in which he was born, his childhood, his boyhood, his manhood. All are dealt with a wealth of detail one would not think possible to be contained in six stanzas.

Nambiaroorar lived for an all too short a period of eighteen years. I have presumed that his marriage took place in his fourte-

enth year. Certainly not earlier. He had only four years to marry two women, to visit seventynine pilgrim centres as far flung as Maraikkaadu (modern Vedaaranyam) on the south-east extremity of Tamilnadu to *Kaalathi*, now in Andra-pradesh, several miles to the North of Madras, and fifteen miles to the north-east of Renigunta Railway Station, and to sing 100 decads running into 1016 stanzas in 17 puns or *raagams*. Year for year, compared to 13 years of pilgrimage and song life of Thirugnanasambandhar, and nearly forty years of similar life of Appar, Nambiaroorar's output of song far exceed those of the other two saints with their respective 219 pilgrimage centres and 383 decads comprising 4000 stanzas, and 126 pilgrimage centres and 313 decads comprising 3064 stanzas.

Nambiaroorar had, as is natural to a human being, forgotten his fall from heaven, his plea to Lord Civan to intervene and redeem him if he was on the point of falling into the snares of worldly life, and Lord Civan's promise to do so. Five are the activities of Lord Civan; creating, sustaining, destroying, causing forgetfulness of past lives, and bestowing grace. Of these, the first three only are commonly remembered, the fifth is usually not correctly understood for what it implies, namely, conferring *mukti*. The fourth, causing forgetfulness, is usually not remembered, and more important still, not understood. It corresponds to what the unknown fourteenth century author calls, "The Cloud of Forgetting." Once a soul is born (reborn) on earth, it does not only not remember its past but also imagines that it is a new entity, and that the birth it has recently taken is its first and only birth. This forgetfulness is an act of grace of God. For, forgetful of its past, the soul is able to settle down to the course of its present life as determined by *prarabdha karma* and the *vasanas*. For it is in this Cloud of Forgetting that the soul has to once again discover what it is and is to make efforts to apprehend the Godhead.

Nambiaroorar was no exception to the general rule of a soul being subject to forgetfulness. He forgot who he had been, how he had come to be born on earth, and was about to marry the girl who had been spoken as his bride. Man may forget his commitment to God. But God does not forget His commitment to His devotees. Saint Manikkavachakar sings:

O Lord, Who very much more solicitous

than a mother who mindfully suckles her child,
trailed after me from place to place....

* * *

Lord Civan, personification of solicitude as He is, hastened to keep His promise to Aalalasunda^{ar} to intervene and redeem him from the snares of worldly life. Let us hear Sekkizhar relate the exciting tale.

That He might waylay him and make him His slave according to the noble promise graciously made in Kailas ringed by the resounding Vedas, the Unique Person—

unobtainable to the two, Vishnu and Brahma, inspite of one of them flying overhead and the other digging into the bowels of the earth to find His crown and feet — came.

* * *

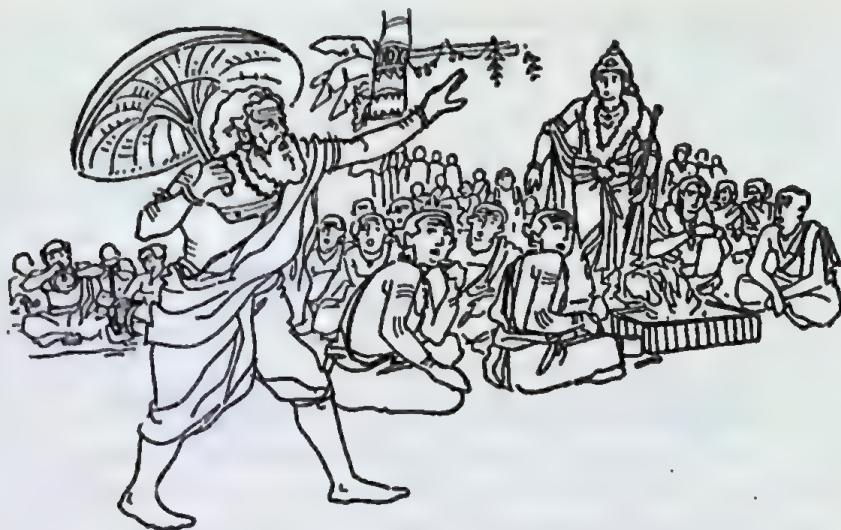
With the merit-conferring pure ash
shining on the forehead—
like a white veil enveloping the eye
situated between the eyebrows,
With the tuft of snowy-white grey hair
falling over and tossing about on the forehead
as if the cool moon
(adorning the locks of Lord Civan)
had ripened into sheaves of corn
and had fallen down on the forehead.

* * *

With the string of *rudraksha* seeds worn on the ears
dangling low on the shoulders,
with the white upper garment on his shoulders
along with the sacred thread
across his resplendent handsome chest
swaying as He came along walking,
with a sun-shading umbrella
displayed in His jewelled head,

* * *

With a waist-garment
which swayed side to side as he walked,
displaying beneath it the antiquity
of the loin-cloth low down on the abdomen,
With a bamboo stick,
to the head of which a white cloth and blades of *kusa*
grass had been tied



held in one hand,
with faltering steps,

* * *

He came,
and standing in the midst of the assemblage
in the *pandal*
where the marriage ceremony
according to the holy *Vedic* rites
was about to begin,

He said:

"All of you, listen to these words of mine."
Thus spoke He of the lips
which had in the ancient days uttered
thousands of *slokas* of the *Vedas*."

174 to 177—T 28 to 31 and 179-T33

The assemblage and the bridegroom-elect said in one voice:
"Your arrival is auspicious to us: it is the fruit of our *thavam*.
Pray, say what you want."

The Lord with the unique hair-do—
now disguised as an old man
with a patch of white hair—
addressing the great man of Naavaloor, said:
"Settle here and now
a great dispute
based on a long ago agreement
between you and me,
and then set about your rites."

The peerless one of Naavaloor
who stood listening
to Him with an eye on the forehead forbid thus,
said:

"If there be a dispute between you and me,
I will not marry until I settle that dispute;
therefore, tell me about it
that I may conclude these rites."

* * *

On his saying so,
the Lord without beginning or end said:
"O brahmins, this is my say, listen.
This *Ooran* of Naavaloor is my slave."
Thus spoke our Lord
Who has, besides, as His slaves
everyone of great eminence
beginning with Vishnu, Brahma, and the Devas.

* * *

Said thus the Lord,
and all those seated or standing around
who heard Him exclaimed:
"Who does he think he is?",
and approached him,
some angry with him,
others laughing at him.
Navaloorar said:
"Fine indeed is this talk of this brahmin!"
and laughed in his face.

* * *

At the derider's face looked He—
the One greater than every being—
and shivered and shrank within Himself.
Holding up the slipping upper garment,
He went forward and asked:
"As this is a palm-leaf pact of those days,
what do you mean laughing at this matter?,
O varlet!"

* * *

The magnanimous descendant of flawless family.
moved by thoughts of ancient friendship.
contained his laughter, and said:
"(For the first time in our lives)
we have heard from you
about blameless brahmins
becoming slaves of another brahmin,"
He added: "Is this brahmin a mad fellow?"

"Demented let me be, or demon let me be;
 shamed shall I not feel
 by howsmuch evil you might say today.
 If, in spite of all this, you do not know Me,
 let us not have any clever talk from you;
 come and serve me" 181 to 187—T 35 to 41.

* * *

Navaloorar lost his patience, and angrily said: "Show me the palm-leaf deed!" "Who are you?", retorted the aged brahmin, "to ask to see the palm-leaf deed? You have but to serve me on my showing it to this assemblage." Saying so, he stepped back. Forthwith, Navaloorar pursued the aged brahmin, and, snatching the palm-leaf from his hands, tore it into bits. Whereupon, the aged brahmin set up a wail for justice. Those standing around intervened, and, when peace had been restored, they asked the old man where he hailed from. "From Vennainalloor, not far from here," he replied, and continued: "Let it be; this man by the mere fact of snatching the palm-leaf from my hand and destroying it has confirmed my claim."

Aroorar, looking at him, said to himself, "Seems to be a seasoned litigant!", and suggested to him, "If Vennainalloor is your place, let us go there and settle this unjust claim." The old man agreed, and, saying that he would show to the righteous brahmins the original deed of bondage, hobbled ahead with his walking-stick beating a tattoo on the stony pathway. Arriving at Vennainalloor, he repeated his claim, and complained before the brahmins assembled there about the rowdy behaviour of Navaloorar. They asked him to prove his claim by traditional practice or precedent, or written document or oral evidence. He answered that the palm-leaf submitted by him at Naavaloor was a copy, and offered to show now the original if the brahmins would ensure that Navaloorar would not repeat his rowdy behaviour. On being assured in this respect, he produced the original document. It read:

"This is the deed executed by Arooran,
 Aadicaivan of Naavaloor,
 the dwelling place of sacred brahmins.
 "To the Great Sage, the Lunatic of Vennainalloor,
 I and all my progeny
 will do hereditary service.
 To this effect, I, sound of mind and body,

have hereby executed this document of palm-leaf
and have set my signature in token thereof."

205-T 59

* * *

On hearing the text of the document, the assembled brahmins invited Navaloorar to make certain that the signature was that of the bearer of his name—his grandfather. The aged brahmin scoffed at the suggestion, saying, "Who is this fellow to verify his grandfather's signature? Fetch any other document signed by his grandfather and compare the signatures and decide the genuineness of the document." This was done to everyone's satisfaction, and the assembled brahmins with one accord turned to Navaloorar and said, "You, Navaloorar, have lost your case to this Vedic sage. It is your duty to serve him in the manner he bids you." And he answered, "How can I refuse to abide by this decision?"

Then the assembled brahmins asked the aged sage, "If, as you said, our famed town is your place of residence, please show us your dwelling place." And he answered, "If none of you know, then go with me." Saying so, he went along followed by Nambiaroobar and the brahmins and entered Thiruvaratthurai, the temple in that town, and was seen no more. All the people assembled there stood bewildered.

On the aged One entering our Lord's temple, Nambi exclaimed:

"Why has this person
of a chest with a dangling sacred thread,
entered our Master's temple?",
and, impelled by a great desire,
followed Him alone,
calling on Him to stop.

Whereupon, the Lord along with His Dame
appeared in the sky above, mounted on a bull,
and began to enlighten him thus;

* * *

"Formerly, you were my devotee; later,
on a desire of an earlier life
surging up in you,
by Our command you were born on earth.
But that the misery-laden worldly life
might not trail you,
We trailed you,
and, in the presence of brahmins of goodly sense,
We waylaid you and enslaved you. 212, 213—T. 66, 67

Thus God keeps His promise, and, despite themselves, redeems His devotees, often much against their will. This has always been so in every age and every country.

On hearing these words of the Lord, Nambiaroorar, overcome by ecstasy, exclaimed, "So, this forcible enslaving was Your deed, O Lord Who dances on the Hall in Thillai!"

The Lord Continued,
"By speaking violent words,
You have gained the nickname, 'Vanthondan' (Rowdy Devotee).

To Us, the most love-laden and best form of worship is hymns.

Therefore, on earth,
sing of Us in words of Tamil."

Thus said He
of the lips which sing the sacred Vedas. 216 T 70

* * *

And Vanthondar stammered in reply;
"O scum-free Ambrosia
Who bestowed on me Experience of Yourself
and redeemed me
who did not realise the profit
which would accrue to me
through Your coming in the guise of a brahmin
to win me by a dispute!
To-day, about Your great ocean of virtue,
what will this cur learn,
and in what words will I sing?" 218 T 72

* * *

Looking compassionately at the devotee,
the Lord of lovely eyes graciously said,
"Formerly, you called Me a crazy person,
therefore, sing about Me,
letting my name be 'The Crazy One' itself."
And the great Vanthondar, who stood by
awaiting His pleasure,
began to sing about the Magnanimous One
Who had enslaved him. 219 T 73

* * *

He sang exultingly:

Piththaa! Pirai-soodi!
O Crazy One!
O crescent moon-adorned One!

O Great Lord! O Dispenser of grace!
 You have installed Yourself
 in the mind of me
 who contemplate You
 without forgetting You
 in any circumstances whatever;
 O Father Who abide in Arulthurai of Vennainalloor
 on the southern bank of the River Pennai,
 having become Your slave,
 can I hereafter ever deny it? VII. d. 1. st. 1

* * *

Many devotees down the ages have addressed Lord Civan by many names, but never before has anyone called Him a Crazy One. Lord Civan, on His side, had honoured several of His devotees with names; for instance, Manikkavachakar, Navukkarasar, Ammaiye. But He had never called any devotee "The rowdy Devotee." This name-calling episode is evidence of the unique relationship between Lord Civan and Navaloorar. But neither the name given by his parents nor the one given by Lord Civan is the name by which the unique devotee is known to the people today. They have given him their own name. Of this later.

From Vennainalloor, Vanthondar proceeded through Naavaloor to Thiruththuraiyoor, and, standing before the Lord abiding in the temple at that shrine, he sang a sacred decad which would divert him from the road to rebirth. He pleaded:

O Lord, You intervened and enslaved me in time,
 preventing me from going down the shameful path
 by force of evil *Karma*;
 to me, Your slave,
 do graciously grant now the boon
 of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*. 225-T79

* * *

Thavam is a word untranslatable into English. It stands for a combination of several qualities. It stands for charity, that is compassion in the heart towards all creatures without exception, austerities, mortification of one's own body, non-attachment, not killing any creature, not eating meat, meditation, and contemplation. So, when Vanthondar prayed for the boon of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*, he prayed for all the qualities that go to make an ascetic, he prayed for renunciation, the crowning glory of *thavam*, he

prayed for the apprehension of the One Reality, he prayed for extirpation of desire, he prayed for *mukti*—for release from the cycle of deaths and births.

On being graciously granted the boon of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*, whereby his senses were prevented from going their several ways and were subdued into being channelised in one path alone, he was seized by a desire to adore the sacred dance of the Cosmic Dancer, Lord Natarajar, at Thillai, modern Chidambaram

At about the hour
when the sun with the sky-traversing lofty chariot
drawn by the green steed
was about to sink into the western sea,
he came to the outskirts of Thirvathikai

* * *

Saying, "I fear to tread with my feet
and enter this great city
where God-owned Thirunavukkarasu,
the saint praised by the world,
the bearer of the tool, the hoe,
loved to perform with his hands
service to the Lord on the bull." he entered *Ciththavatamatam*⁴
situated beyond the cool fields
fed by the sluices.

* * *

In that *matam*
situated in the midst of a flower-garden
teeming with bees,
Vanthondar, with mind filled with love
unto the Lord of *Veerattaanam*
north of the river *Ketilam* of billowing waters,
entered his bed,
while his teeming retinue
also went to sleep around him.
Seeing this,
the lovely-eyed Lord abiding in *Veerattam*
entered the *matam* common to all,
without anyone knowing beforehand,
in the form of an old brahmin,
and, placing His lotus feet
on the sacred flower-decked head of Sundaramoorthi,
pretended to be asleep on His bed.

4. Ciththavata matam—name of a nest-house for holy pilgrims.

Arooran, sensing the state of affairs,
said: "O Vedic Brahmin,
you have placed your feet on my head."
To this, He graciously replied,
"It was done without knowing the direction;
you see, it is on account of my old age."
*Thamilnaathan*⁵, accepting this explanation,
placed his head farther away,
and went to sleep.

* * *

On the brahmin stretching His feet again
even there on to his head,
the Lord of Thirunaavaloor,
saying: "What is this?
You have kicked me many times!"
asked, "Who are you?"
The Lord, Who has hidden the Ganga in His locks,
replied: "Have you not known yet?"
and vanished instantly. 229 to 233—T83 to 87

* * *

Thus the Lord conferred on Vanthondar⁵ the *thiruvadi-deekshai*,
initiation into the fold of devotees by the Guru placing his foot on
the head of the devotee. Vanthondar woke up and wailed in remorse,

"Oh! What have I done!
In my pride I have not recognised Him!"

Saying so, he sang:

Are there indeed in the world
other people like me
who do not know their Lord?
I, an imbecile, cur,
who keep living in the hope
that our Lord will place His feet on my head,
have treated with disdain
the Lord who wears the crescent moon on His locks,
the Lord of diverse forms who rides a bull,
the Lord with a mantle
of the hide of the beast with a trunk,
the Lord Who has a habit of dancing
in the dark cremation ground,
the Lord with the bull-inscribed banner,
the Lord with a throat with a dark stain,
in the brief moment
He came to fulfil my wish.

VII. d. 38 st. 1.

5. One of various appellations of Sundarar.

We do not have the time or space to follow Vanthondar to each abode of Lord Civan which he visited on his way to Thillai, present Chidambaram. Arrived at Thillai, he ardently worshipped Nataraajar, Lord Civan, dancing His eternal cosmic dance. Thousands and thousands of devotees and pilgrims have stood before the image of Lord Civan in His dancing pose with one lifted foot and a swinging arm. It is true that to all of us it has been an inspiring sight, but, nevertheless, only a still pose in bronze casting. While it strains our power of belief and baffles our imagination, to one or two, or perhaps, three or four devotees down the centuries of B.C., and A.C., the Lord has been a living personality vibrating with the joy of the cosmic dance. Saint Manikkavachakar has painted a word-picture of the sight that met his eyes when he watched the image of lord Civan. Before his physical eyes the image came to life with radiant flesh and form, and he could hear the tinkling of the anklets of the Lord as His feet performed a unique choreography on the floor of the Golden Hall in Thillai. The same captivating vision has been caught and preserved for us by the Sovereign of Speech, Saint Thirunavukkarasar. He sings:

If one could but be privileged to see
 the arched eye-brows,
 the rosy red lips,
 the budding smile,
 the wet matted locks,
 the milk-white sacred ash
 on the body of coral-like hue,
 and the sweet lifted foot,
 even human birth is desirable
 on this vast earth!

* * *

Even such a vision Jia /anthondar see as he stood transfixed.
 Sekkizhar's verse on this scene is a precious gem.

With his eyes monopolising to themselves
 the five great powers of perception—
 seeing, smelling, sensing, savouring, and hearing—
 with all the invaluable instruments of knowledge—
 mind, intellect, discrimination, and final
 appropriation of knowledge—
 all four transmuted into discrimination,
 with the qualities three—
thaamasam, raajasam, saativikam—
 now transformed into *saativikam* alone,

he revelled in the flood of delight
 which flowed into him
 from the unique great dance of boundless bliss
 which the Lord with matted locks,
 where dwelt the moon,
 performed; and
 his whole being blossomed
 under the power of unremitting joy.

252 T106

* * *

Even while Vanthondar was thus engaged in experiencing the beatific vision which is the fruit of contemplation, the Lord spoke from heaven, and bade Vanthondar go to Him at Aaroor. Vanthondar may have forgotten why he was born on earth, and what he had to do, but the Lord had not forgotten. More than a mother, he was ever mindful of his devotee's welfare. Vanthondar had a date with destiny and he should not be tardy in keeping it.

Taking, or, we should say, tearing himself away from the vision of the dancing Lord in Thillai, he hastened through Kazhulamal, Thirukkolakkaa, Thiruppunkoor, Mayilaaduthurai Ambarmaakaalam, and Thiruppkukaloor, and arrived at Thiruvaa-roor to keep his date with destiny.

He approached the portals of the temple with this song on his lips:

Shore, sea and mountains,
 and my words as well,
 in morning, evening and at all times,
 He permeates, the Unique One,
 He of the Land of Rudra,
 the Husband of the handsome Hill-maid.
 King of the Heavenly Ones
 and the *rakshasas*, of all them, is He,
 Where he abides is Aaroor!
 O Devotees! Ask Him
 if He would take even me as His slave.

VII d. 73 st. 1

Entering the temple, he proceeded to the presence of Lord Thiagaraja, the name by which Lord Civan is known in that temple, and stood singing ecstatically. Even then, a voice rose in the hearing of Aaroorar and proclaimed:

"We have given Ourselves in companionship to you;
 ever and always be dressed in the guise

which you assumed for the rites that day
when we on a former occasion enslaved you,
and, to the entire fulfilment of your desire,
live on this earth and sport about!"

273-T 127.

* * *

Most men are bridegrooms for only a day; God alone is a bridegroom for eternity; and all human beings, male and female, are His brides. Manikkavachakar's *Civakaami*, in describing her divine Lover to her mother, calls Him *nityamanavaalar* (Eternal Bridegroom). But, by the blessing of Lord Civan, Vanthondar remained a bridegroom to the end of his days, clad in silk clothing with gold zari border, adorned by numerous jewels, and crowned by a golden tiara set with precious stones as befitted a prince of the house of Narasinga-munaiyar. He walked about twirling a cane studded with jewels. Since then the common people of his days and of our days as well, know him only as Sundaramoorthi Swamigal, Sundarar for short, the person with the handsome form. And Sundarar he shall be for us too for the rest of this chronicle.

Let us pause here with Sundarar on the eve of his date with destiny and recall item by item the various spiritual accoutrements in which Lord Civan attired His devotee to face the date with destiny.

Firstly, Lord Civan came in the form of an aged Brahmana to claim Navaloorar as His slave.

Secondly, He bestowed on Navaloorar a vision of Himself and His Dame as mounted on a bull.

Thirdly, He bestowed on Navaloorar the boon of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*.

Fourthly, he gave Navaloorar the *Thiruvadi deekshai*.

Fifthly, He bestowed on Vanthondar the vision of the Cosmic Dance. Not more than a few weeks ago, he had bestowed on Vanthondar the boon of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*. Here, at Thillai, Vanthondar gained the beatific vision, the highest fruit of treading the Pathway of *Thavam*, whose last phase is contemplation.

Sixthly and lastly, at Aaroor the Lord bestowed on Vanthondar the highest of privileges, the privilege of companionship.

In theological parlance, this stage on the Pathway to God is called the *saha-maargam*, the pathway trod in the role of companion of God. *Civa-jnaana-siddhiyaaar*, the foremost of the canonical books on *Caiva-Siddhantha*, defines *saha-maargam* thus:

Saha-maargam is:
 being engaged in the contemplation
 of the Whole Effulgence
 by the process of controlling the five senses,
 obstructing the flow of the two breaths,
 and bringing it to a state of stirlessness,
 gaining knowledge of the six centres (plexes) in the body,
 and understanding their deep significances,
 passing through them to the top,
 partaking of the ambrosia,
 from the region of the moon (within the skull),
 and storing it up to the fullest extent in the body,

and other acts; in short, going through all the eight phases of Yoga..

* * *

The reader will remember that Sundarar's first prayer to Lord Civan was for the boon of treading the Pathway of Yoga. His prayer was answered and the boon of companionship was conferred on him.

In *Sanaathana Dharma* theology as well as in the theology of the School of *Caiva-Siddhantha*, *saha-maargam* is equated with the third and last *pada-mukti*, the *saaroopya mukti*. Lord Jesus Christ said, "Unless you are born again...." Vanthondar was born again without undergoing the process of a mundane death of a carnal body, and gained *saaroopya-mukti* on earth itself. Vanthondar had gained *jeevan-muktahood*.

"The King can do no wrong" was a proverb current in English when kings were held to govern by divine right. But such a claim cannot hold good today. On the other hand, the maxim that a *jeevanmukta* can do no wrong has withstood the test of time. It is, however, not an absolute axiom, for so long as a soul is clothed with a carnal body, it has to face many pit-falls, many ills of the

flesh. Therefore, a *jeevanmukta*'s life is like that of a walker on the edge of a sword. *Savikalpa-samadhi* is full of insecurity. No man is safe from the perils of life till he is dead, till he gains *nir-vikalpa-samadhi*.

What are the privileges of *saha-maarga*? This is more than friendship. It is intimacy. When one has conferred companionship, that is, intimacy on a person, he has assumed certain liabilities; he has underwritten certain risks.

Thiruvalluvar has devoted one chapter of ten couplets to Intimacy, the privilege of Companionship.

It would be worthwhile to reproduce in translation Thiruvalluvar's chapter on Intimacy.

If you ask what intimate friendship is,
it is that which does not object
to the liberties taken by a friend. 1

Liberties taken by a friend
are the very spice of friendship;
it is the duty of perfect men to take them cheerfully. 2

Of what use is intimate friendship
if it will not put up
with the privileged actions of one's friends
as if they had been done by oneself? 3

If, due to the privilege of friendship,
friends act on their behalf
without their permission,
wise men will like it
on account of the desirability of the action. 4

If intimate friends do some painful thing,
take it either as a piece of foolishness
or privilege of friendship. 5

Those who live up to the rules of friendship
will not forsake
their connection with friends of ancient standing,
even when loss has been caused by them. 6

Men of long-standing loving friendship
will not cease loving their friends
even though they do something ruinous to them. 7

The day on which a friend takes
 an unwarranted liberty
 is a red-letter-day
 to men capable of intimate friendship
 which will not brook
 anyone speaking of the shortcomings of one's friends. 8

The world will like those
 who do not give up the comradeship with friends
 of unbroken long-standing intimacy. 9

Those who do not depart from their courtesy
 towards intimate friends,
 even though they give offence,
 will be liked even by those who do not like them. 10

* * *

Lord Civan assumed liabilities similar to the ones detailed in the above chapter. He also underwrote certain risks arising from assuming such liabilities.

One marvels at the craftsmanship of Sekkizhar. No sooner the account of Lord Civan bestowing Himself on Vanthondar as a companion had been given in one stanza, and Sundarar had just finished praising the Lord in three stanzas for this unique gift, than Sekkizhar records the birth on earth of Kamalini, one of the handmaidens of Parvathi in *Kailas*, one of the two maidens on whom Aalaalasundarar cast his roving eyes and who responded in return. She was named Paravaiyar. Seven stanzas later, she is a nubile maiden of bewitching beauty who made Sundarar gasp with wonder when he cast his eyes on her on his way back from the temple.

The nubile age, the age of consent, in Tamilnadu in ancient days was twelve. Sekkizhar condenses birth and growth to nubility of Paravaiyar in just six stanzas, one stanza for every two years of the life of Paravaiyar. Here are those poetry-surcharged stanzas.

Sometime before (Sundarar came to Thiruvaaroor),
 Kamalini of breasts adorned by dazzling jewels—
 one of the two handmaidens of flower-laden tresses
 who, standing out of the common band of handmaidens
 do privileged service to Her
 Who is one-half of the Primordial Lord

of pre-eminent great *Kailas*—
chose Thiruvaaroor, the sacred city
of boundless glory and age,
and incarnated herself there.

* * *

As if a scintillating gem was born,
she incarnated in the spouseless clan
of Vestal Virgins-like *Rudra-kanikaiyars*.
Hoary elders of the clan adorned her with jewels,
and, as per rules laid down by the *sastras*,
invested her with the name Paravaiyar
on the day of the asterism *Thiruvaathirai*,
auspicious to the Pure One who wears the moon.

* * *

The child's large circle of relatives who acted thus,
praying for the well-being of the child,
celebrated periodically in the coming months,
the stages of the growth of the infant.
Even while those eminent in wisdom among them
rejoiced in the thought
that Lakshmi, the Dame on the Lotus,
who had before received a boon in this very place,
had herself come down as this child,
it reached the toddler's stage of childhood.

* * *

Young doe of deer is she?
Or a tender bud of a divine flower?
Or the early stage of fragrant honey?
Or the beautiful tendril of the young coral
beneath the waves of the sea?
Or the early streaks of the rays of the moon?
Or the miniature bow
on which Cupid practised in his youth?

* * *

Thus would her relatives wonder
as her sweet beauty swelled from day to day.
She played the games of light *kalangu*,
soft ball, *ammaanai*, the swing
.to the accompaniment of sweet song
of bone and sinews-melting desire
to merge in the feet of the Creeper
of the snowy mountain—*Parvati*.
Occasionally, a more serious note was observed in the
manner of the singing.

* * *

Crossing the stages of infancy and childhood,
 with a beauty which roused a desire
 to hug her person,
 with *kongu*-buds-surpassing breasts
 which seemed to grow as if impelled by a desire
 to qualify for containing all the heaped riches
 bestowed by Cupid,
 she throbbed with life.

277 to 282—T 131 to 136

* * *

In dealing with the birth and growth of Paravaiyar in no more than six stanzas, there is more than the prosaic need to be brief. Through these all too few six stanzas the chronicler desires to convey to us the phenomenal speed of the growth of Paravaiyar from birth to womanhood. The growth of girls in tropical countries, in regions close to the equator, as Tamilnadu for instance, is astoundingly fast. In spite of seeing this speedy growth in one's own daughters, in one's own grand-daughters, one is never free from the sense of surprise at seeing a child, who was lisping, it seems, not more than a year or two ago, appear before one's eyes as a perfect picture of nubile womanhood, with all the allure of youth, with all the blandishments of the daughters of Eve. When we meet after an absence of what seems like a few months or, at best, a year or two, a child who, when we met her not so long ago, was a cheeky youngster, a female Tomboy, a brash and impudent flapper, an imp in pigtails, we find before us a vision of womanhood, a demure damsel armed with the four deceptive qualities of timidity, shyness, inveighing air of ignorance asking to be instructed, and fastidiousness—in fact an epitome of a person who will stoop to conquer, a relentless hunter armed with no more than a pair of eyes which can reflect all the gamut of emotions, and an inscrutable smile, a hunter who had marked you down long ago as her prey and who will inevitably smite you down, you who are only too eager to be so smitten. Sekkizhar, the master of artistry of words, purposefully crowded the birth and growth of Paravaiyar in just six stanzas of no more than a total of twenty four lines and a hundred and twenty words.

Moreover, Sekkizhaar had to reflect in his poems another important factor. We have surmised that Sundarar could not have been more than fourteen years in age in all probability, when

he was enslaved by Lord Civan on the occasion of his wedding at the bride's residence. Already fourteen years of age, Sundarar had an all but too short a time to work out his *prarabdha*, to make love to and wed Kamalini and Anindithai, one born at Thiruvaaroor and the other hundreds of kilometres away at Thirugnaayiru near Thiruvotriyoor. But *prarabdha* works itself out and does not wait on our pleasure. While we should not ignore the working of *prarabdha*, nevertheless, if we consider the two love-lapses as constituting the purpose of Sundarar's life on earth, we would miss the wood for the trees, even though every incident of Sundarar's hectic life seems to revolve round the two love episodes. Sundarar had a rough path to tread to *mukti*, to release from the bonds of deaths and births, to integration with the Godhead, his legs shackled to Paravaiyar and to another damsel whom we shall meet in later pages at Thiruvotriyoor.

According to the working of *prarabdha* and the design of Lord Civan, Sundarar saw Paravaiyar, and Paravaiyar, in her turn, saw Sundarar, and both were smitten by love at first sight.

Sundarar breaks into a fantastic rhapsody over the vision of Paravaiyar thus:

Is this a flower-laden sprig of *karpakam*, the wishing tree?
 Or Cupid's life's greatest achievement?
 Or meritorious fruit of the merit of Beauty?
 Or a fragrant creeper
 on which has blossomed a full moon
 with a cluster of variegated objects—
 a dark cloud, a bow, a blue lotus, a coral—adorning it?
 Or is it a product of a miracle, of the grace of God?

286.T140

* * *

Does not make sense, does it? Then you have not been a crazy lover; you have never fallen madly in love with anyone at first sight.

With former *vasana* fulfilling itself, and desire overpowering timidity, shyness, inveighing air of ignorance, and fastidiousness natural to all women, Paravaiyar cast her eyes at the same time on Sundarar and wondered:

He who now appears before me
 in a great aura of light—

is he *Murukan*, the handsome God?
 Or peerless Cupid himself?
 Or *Vinjayan*, the celestial being,
 with a never-fading garland of flowers?
 Or a person fully endowed
 with the grace of Lord Civan
 of locks of russet hue
 like a flash of lightning?
 Who is this person
 who has upset my mind?

290 T144

* * *

It is interesting to note that they met in the Temple of Thiyyagesa and fell in love. One would have believed that in the ninth century, unlike young men and women of these days, visitors to the temple in those days would have had all their mind filled with thoughts of God and would have been blind to everything but the cosmic dance of Lord Civan, and deaf to all sounds except the tinkle of the anklets on the feet of the Lord. But, perhaps, we have had too much of expectations and had left ourselves open to disappointment. Perhaps, we have forgotten that boys will be boys and girls will be girls whether it is the 1st century B.C., or the 9th century A.D. or the 20th century. Magnet has attracted iron from time immemorial. What will be more true is perhaps that Lord Civan wanted anything that happened to his slave to happen under His watchful eyes.

In Naavaloor, not more than a few months back, there had been parents and relatives and neighbours to bespeak a maid in marriage to Naavaloorar. And he was then a free man. Now Naavaloorar dubbed Vanthondan by the Lord, and called Sundarar by the common people, was a slave, and far from kith and kin. A slave has no freedom of thought, word, or deed. When the slave-owner says, "Abandon thoughts of marriage, desert the girl you were to wed, and follow me," he has to comply. He has no choice. Naavaloorar was no exception to this law of slavedom. He had to forsake the girl he was to wed, and let her pine and waste away. Like a cur when called to heel, he followed his owner, rather resentfully of course, to Veennainalloor. Ordered to sing, he sang, commanded to go to Aaroor, he went. And now, that he had inadvertently allowed his eyes to rove and his heart to throb,

he remembered he was a slave, and like many a slave in the Southern States of America, he went to his Master and entreated Him to let him have Paravaiyar as wife. Henry David Thoreau, the American Philosopher, said, "It is bad to have a Northern overseer, it is worse to have a Southern Overseer, it is worse when you are the slave-driver yourself." But Thoreau had not known about Navaloorar and his slave-driver who was none other than Lord Civan Himself. *Manikkavachakar* sings:

"Henceforth, instead of contemplating Your feet only
day and night,
to the exclusion of all other thought,
shall I, O my Father,
brood on shedding this body on earth
and on entering the haven of your feet?
Fine indeed is my serfdom to you!"

* * *

This is true serfdom, this is eternal freedom, eternal freedom from the fruits of Karma. Thomas Merton, the 20th century mystic, defining a mystic, says: "In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own will." Yet, at the same time, his surrender is to a God 'Who is more intimate to him than his own self.' A *jeevanmukta* is a mystic par excellence. He is one who has surrendered his will to God's will, he is one whose thoughts, words, and deeds are no longer his, but God's. He is one who has overcome the Law of Karma. Umapathi Civam, one of the greatest exponents of *Caivasiddhantha*, portrays for us in very vivid words a *jeevan-mukta*. He says:

No matter he does atrocious deeds,
commits murder, theft, and is addicted to drinking,
no matter he lives a way of life
which is not the righteous way;
no matter he violates the code of his caste,
or commits mistakes,
provided he is free of any selfish act,
and is transformed into IT,
The Lord Himself becomes his body and soul,
eats, sleeps, walks,
Himself perform all the various acts of experiencing,
and, abiding in him inseparably,
transforms him into Himself.

This is the process which is spoken of
as the surging Civa-consciousness.

* * *

Slave to Lord Civan as Sundarar was, he went to Lord Civan to let him have Paravaiyar as his wife. Lord Civan, who once broke a marriage, now became a marriage-broker. He appeared in the dreams of His devotees in Aaroor and bade them arrange for the wedding of Sundarar to Paravaiyar. And so they were wed. I wish I could add "And they lived happily ever after." If they did not live happily ever after, they lived quite blissfully for some time. Describing this all too short period of bliss, Sekkizhar sings:

The Prince of beautiful Naavaloor,
by the grace of Civan, Lord of all the Devas,
practised with delight for many days
the traditional *Yoga*,
resting on the crests of the closely set hills
which were the golden-ornamented breasts
of the willowy damsel called Paravai
with a slender waist like a streak of lightning.

327 T 181.

* * *

Sekkizhar devotes one stanza and no more than one stanza to describe the family life led by Sundarar. He sings:

Keeping in full bloom on his head and heart
the haven, the lotus flower,
the Feet of the Lord, his Suzerain,
Sundarar adorned them with many garlands
of decades in poetic Tamil,
and led his life sporting
with *Paravai* of lightning-like slender-waist.

328-T182

* * *

With a literary artistry unique to Sekkizhar, he conveys by this no more than one stanza that Sundarar's love-life lasted no longer than it takes to read the one stanza describing that life. For in the next stanza we see Sundarar, whose head and heart already housed his Lord, now setting out to the temple which houses his Lord. Sekkizhar's description of Sundarar leaving his mansion

for the temple must be reproduced. For therein lies a great truth. Sekkizhar sings:

While he led his life thus
in the company of his dame,
one day,
moved by adesire to go to their lovely Lord's temple
and worship Him,
he got up from his luxurious seat in a bower
—festooned by strings of cool pearls—
erected on a raised platform
by the side of a rock-garden
adjacent to a tank teeming with flowers.

* * *

Clad in a beautiful garment,
the envy of the immortals in heaven,
his body diffusing fragrance
from the paste of sandal and saffron rubbed thereon,
wearing a diadem on his head,
decked with shining ornaments
set with precious stones,
he looked more beautiful than he would
if all the lavish wealth of *Indra*
had been lavished on him.

* * *

In his hand a cane chased with gold,
studs on his ears,
sacred thread lying slack on his frame,
on the forehead the shining sacred ash;
with beautiful damsels
declaring decidedly in favour of this turn-out,
he stepped resplendently into the street,
a veritable picture of Civan the Sacred.

329 to 331—T 183 to 185

* * *

I have taken the liberty of translating the phrase, “*caiva mei-th-thiru-uruvin kolam*” appearing in the last line of stanza 185 in the original as “a veritable picture of Civan the Sacred”. Aalaala-sundarar, before being sent down from heaven to be reborn on earth was in the stage of ‘*saameepya padamukti*’. That is, he was a close attendant on God. When the Lord conferred on him His companionship and bade him to be clad and adorned in future in the same manner in which he was attired on his wedding-day,

the Lord conferred on him *saaroopa-pada-mukti*, a grade of *mukti* in which the aspirant for *mukti* is given the privilege of having the same garb and guise of Lord Civan Himself. And I have assumed that this form corresponded to the same garb and guise which Lord Civan wore on the day of His wedding to Parvathi.

Arrived at the temple, Sundarar's first thought was when he would gain *saayujya-mukti*, eternal freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. Sekkizhar relates:

On seeing numerous very worthy servitors of the Lord
from all over the earth,
besides the heaven-dwellers,
assembled in the *Devaasriyan*,
a hall in the precincts of the temple of the Lord
with an eye on His forehead,
Sundarar speculated which will be the day
when he would be made a servitor to those people,
and went his way praising the Lord.

339 T 189

* * *

Viranmindar, a great devotee of the Lord, who was seated in the *Devaasriyan*, unable to see what passed in the mind of Sundarar, only saw him pass by the devotees without paying homage to them. With righteous indignation, Viranmindar hurled imprecations at Sundarar. Sekkizhar thus relates this incident in his chronicle of Viranmindar:

"Excommunicate this Vanthondan
who sidles away without coming up to
and worshipping the servitors of Civan
who are seated resplendently
on the *Devaasriyan* of austerity-charged repute."
He was to gain more grace.

* * *

He followed this up by saying:

"Excommunicate Ooran
who proceeds without paying homage
to the servitors of Lord Civan
who bent as a bow the lofty mountain,
and excommunicate too
Him who wears the crescent moon on His crown,
and dons snakes as ornaments,
and who claims lordship over Vanthondan!"

497, 498—7&7

Sundarar, however, unmindful of the imprecations hurled at him, continued on his way to the sanctum-sanctorum. Sekkizhar describes in vivid language what happened thereafter. He sings:

"To these servitors servitor I will become!"
 With this eagerness on the increase,
 Sundarar bowed down to the evil-conquering entrance
 festooned with bunting,
 and, entering it with palms joined in obeisance,
 fell prostrate,
 and adorned his head with the feet of the Lord
 adorned by garland of fragrant *kondrai* blossoms,
 Who appeared before Sundarar
 exhibiting His holy feet
 that he might see them.

336 T 190

On beholding the feet impossible for Brahma and Vishnu to see, Sundarar burst into lyrical praise of the feet. He sang:

Rosy lotuses over which hover bees—
 the eternal and great holy supreme Vedas—
 Lotuses which blossom in the hearts of devotees,
 exceedingly great Transcendent Bliss,
 the Effulgent Honey,
 bestowing themselves on even a person of my sort,
 they stand before me.

* * *

Dance do they on the Golden Hall
 that the world may redeemed be;
 black in the face with anger they became
 at Death that he lost his life;
 blush did they
 on the rosy finger of the Great Mountain's Daughter,
 of tresses sagging under chaplets,
 caressing them.

* * *

Shine do they in the hearts of righteous great saints;
 enlighten do they the unenlightened;
 Effulgence of all effulgence that shine forth;
 of status beyond ken of Brahma and Vishnu;

* * * *

Ride do they on the Elephant—the Vedas;
 forbear they did follies of foolish me;
 future follies too to forbear
 they condescend;

O Lord of the ghouls, Your Lotus Feet!
 Lord Civan,
 The knight with the bull as His mount,
 desirous of bestowing on Sundarar,
 who praised Him thus,
 that very moment, at that very spot,
 that very thing he sought for,
 bestowed on him the intuitive power
 to understand the lineal service
 of the servitors of eternal glory,
 and graciously followed it up
 with a narration of their glory in these words:

* * *

*In their glory, themselves they equal,
 by devotion they appropriate me:
 by union with me they conquer the world;
 Shortcomings they have none;
 established in unique state they are;
 through their love they enjoy bliss;
 duality they have transcended;*

Do you also join these.

337 to 342—T 191 to 196

* * *

What kind of persons were they that merited so much praise from Lord Civan Himself? Sekkizhar relates in eleven thrilling stanzas of his poem, 'The Glory of the Galaxy of Devotees,' the unique qualities of the servitors assembled in the Devaasriyan. He sings:

In the lovely temple where abides the Lord
 of the heavenly host—
 He who took residence in the anthill,
 the Primordial Lord—
 in its effulgent beauteous court,
 adjoining the portals
 of the surrounding ancient ramparts,

1

* * *

lies the Holy Chamber called *Devaasriyan*,
 ceaselessly filled with Brahma, the flower-seated one,
 Indra, and Vishnu,
 in whose wide chest resides she the Lotus-Dweller, and
 other heavenly ones besides.

2

It resembled several thousands of Seas of Milk
filled as it was by the pure effulgence of the sacred white ash
on the bodies of the sorrow-dispelling devotees,
and by the resonance of the talisman—
the Mystic Five Letters.

3

* * *

It resembled the world entire,
as the entire world was gathered therein,
deeming that those who worship the feet of Him,
The Cause of all,
are entitled to rule the world.

4

* * *

Chosen by the Father and publicly given the accolade of servitude,
their bodies prickling
and hearts palpitating with love,
bounden to do sacred service with their hands,
these and countless others besides,

5

* * *

Men as pure inside as the ash
smeared on their spotless frames
resplendent with gems,
by their effulgence they lit up every side,
and shone with ineffable glory.

6

* * *

Even if the elements five
their balance lose in chaos,
never forget they the blossom feet of Him
with the Lady as His twin,
but stand steadfast
by strength of far-famed path of love—
great rocks of blameless character.

7

* * *

Endowed with eternal riches which never wax or wane,
shard and red gold, both with equanimity they view;
they shone with resolve which, with welling love,
sought only to adore.
and sought not deliverance at all.

8

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
their duty none other than God's service,
full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing.
How can I describe their resoluteness?

9

* * *

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
unique servitors of the Dancing Lord,
men of age-long fame,
how shall I here praise
or sing their state?

10

* * *

I shall now proceed to speak
of this great Galaxy of Servitors
on the basis of 'The Lay of The Sacred Servitors'
sung by Aaalalasundarar of eternal fame.

136 to 146-T 1 to 11

* * *

Such was the glory of the Servitors whose unique status the Lord Himself described to Sundarar and bade him go and join them. Furthermore, the Lord bade Sundarar sing their praises in faultless Tamil. Bid thus, he pleaded with the Lord to instruct him in singing the praises of the servitors. And the Lord graciously did so, and spelt out with His own lips, which had bestowed the Vedas on the world, the first line and bade him compose a poem beginning with that line. That famous line was, "*Thillai vaazh anthanar tham adiyaarkum adiyen.*" "Servitor to the servitors of Thillai-dwelling Brahmanas am I."

Bid by the Lord to go and sing the praises of the Galaxy of Devotees, and given, besides, the opening line as well, Sundarar went before the Galaxy of Servitors seated on the *Devaasriyan* and sang:

Servitor to the servitors
of Thillai-dwelling Brahmanas,
servitor to the potter
named after the blue-throated Holy Lord.
servitor to *Iyarpakai* of never-dying fame,
servitor to the servitors of *Ilayaankudi-maaran*,
servitor to *Meipporul*, expert in gaining victories,

servitor to *Viranmendar*
 of the hilly region dense with vast groves,
 servitor to *Amaraneethi*
 decked with garlands of blue lotus and jasmine,
 am I, Aarooran, the slave of the Lord in Aaroor!

1

* * *

Servitor to *Eripaththar* of the broad-leaved axe,
 servitor to the servitors of *Enaathinaathan*,
 servitor to the noble devotee, *Kannappan*,
 skilled in various arts,
 servitor to the servitors of *Kalayan* in *Kadavoor*,
 servitor to the munificent *Maanakkanjaaran*
 of granite shoulders.
 servitor to the servitors of the perfect *Vaattaayan*,
 servitor to *Aanaayar* of *Mangai* on the banks
 of the wave-tossed waters
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord of Aaroor!

2

* * *

Servitor to *Moorthi* who ruled the world with the triad,⁵
 servitor to *Murukan* and *Rudrapasupati*,
 servitor to the holy one called *Naalaippovaar*,
 servitor to the servitors of *Thirukkurippuththondar*,
 servitor to *Sandipperumaan*,
 devotee of the feet of the motherly Lord,
 who felled with his hatchet the foot of his father
 who was enraged at his son
 who was earnestly engaged in worshipping
 the sacred form of the Lord,
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor!

3

* * *

Servitor to the servitors of *Thirunaavukkararasan*
 who took as his best support
 the eternal Holy Perfect Being,
 servitor to the servitors of *Kulachchirayan*,
 the great *Nambi*,

5. triad—the sacred ash, the rudraksha beads, and the matted locks which are the insignia of the devotees of the Lord and of the Lord Himself.

servitor to *Kurumbar* of the great *Mizhalai*,
 and to *Peyaar*,
 servitor to the servitors of *Appoothi*,
 the unique devotee,
 servitor to *Neelanakkar* of *Saaththamangai*
 surrounded by tumultuous waters,
 servitor to the servitors of *Naminandhi*,
 rare among men,
 am I, Aarooran, slave of the Lord in Aaroor!

4

* * *

Servitor to the servitors of my Lord *Sambandhan*
 who worshipped nothing else than the feet of the Lord
 wearing the garland of honey-laden *kondrai* flowers
 whose scent-stored buds the striped bees force open,
 servitor to the servitors of *Eyar-kon-kalikkaaman*,
 servitor to the servitors of our lord *Thirumoolar*,
 servitor to *Thandi* of great vision and to *Moorkkar*,
 servitor to *Somaasimaaran* of *Ambar*,
 am I; Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor!

5

* * *

Servitor to *Saakkayar*
 who, unforgetful of the anklet-girt feet
 of the Partner of *Umai*
 of bra-bound beautiful breasts,
 flung a stone (at His feet daily without fail),
 servitor to the munificent *Sirappuli*
 of outstanding fame,
 servitor to *Siruththondar* who abode in *Sengaattankudi*,
 servitor to *Kazharitrarivaar*
 who surpassed the rain-clouds in munificence,
 servitor to the servitors of *Gananaathan*
 of *Kaazhi* on the seashore,
 servitor of *Kootran* of sharp pointed spear,
 king of *Kalanthalai*,
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor!

6

* * *

Servitor to *Pukazhchcholar*
 who laid down his life at *Karuvoor* girt by groves,
 servitor to *Narasingamunaiyar*, the true devotee,
 servitor to *Athipaththan* of *Naagai* laved by vast waves,

servitor to the servitors
 of the banded bow-bearing *Kalikkamban*
 who chopped off the arms of his wife,
 and to *Kaliyan*, and victory-laden *Satthi*,
 the king of *Varinjaiyoor*,
 servitor to the servitors of *Aiyatikal-kaadavar-kon*,
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor! 7

* * *

Servitor to *Kanampullar*,
 the devotee who held as his refuge none else
 than the anklet-girt feet
 of the Lord with the stained throat,
 and to *Kaari*,
 servitor to the servitors
 of *Nindra-seer-nedumaaran*

who won the battle at *Nelveli* in a just cause,
 servitor to the servitors of *Vaayilaan*
 of ancient *Mayilai*
 where the pink coral swept to the shores by the waves
 dispel the darkness of the night,
 servitor to the gallant *Munaiaduvaar*
 armed with felling weapons,
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor! 8

* * *

Servitor to the servitors
 of *Kazharrchingan*, king of the *Kaadavars*,
 the sovereign who protects the entire sea-girt world,
 servitor to the servitors of the gallant *Idankazhi*
 who wears a garland of many-petalled flowers,
 and *Seruththunai*, king of *Thanjai*,
 servitor to *Pugazhththunai* famed for fixing his mind
 only on the golden feet of the Dancer
 on whose waist-enveloping tiger skin
 a snake is swaying its head from side to side,
 servitor to *Kotpuli* with a spear
 which had seen many a battle,
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor! 9

* * *

Servitor to all who worship the Lord as devotees,
 servitor to the servitors of those
 who sing only the Transcendent Being,

servitor also to those
 who have set their minds on Civan,
 servitor to all those who are born in Thiruvaaroor,
 servitor to those who at all the three hours
 (morning, noon, and evening)
 touch the sacred body of the Lord,
 servitor to the sages who have smeared their bodies
 all over with the sacred ash,
 servitor also to the servitors of those
 beyond the places and times mentioned herein
 who had sought and may seek refuge at the Feet.
 am I, Aarooran, slave unto the Lord in Aaroor!

10

* * *

Servitor to *Poosal* of *Nindravoor*
 where abides the Lord of eternal glory,
 and whose tongue keeps chanting the *Vedas*,
 and servitor to *Maani* of serried bangles, and to *Nesan*
 as well,
 servitor to *Sengkannanaar*
 who, as the *Sotherner*, ruled the world,
 servitor to *Neelakantaththu-p-paanar* am I!
 Those who delight in hearing the servitude of me,
 Aarooran, the first citizen of Thirunaavaloor,
 darling of Sadayan
 who had gained the feet of Haran,
 and of Isaignaani,
 will become devotees of the Lord in Aaroor!

11

Sundarar thus listed sixty saints by name and nine groups of other devotees. He signed the song with his name and the names of his father and his mother. Sekkizhar, when he sang the *Periya-puranam*, included the last three names to the Calendar of Saints and brought up the total to sixty-three.

It should never be imagined that the Calendar is a complete list of all or even most of the saints who lived in Tamilnadu from pre-historic days to the days of Sundarar. We should not forget that this was a song sung at the spur of the moment, and spurred by the imprecations of Viranmendar.

Here ends what may be called the first part of Sundarar's life. Lord Civan suggested on three occasions the first line or word to certain poems. One of them is the very well-known first line of the *Periya-puranam*, "ulakelaam unarnthu otharrkariyavan...." "He

Who is difficult of being experienced (in the mind) and of being expressed (in words)." The second occasion when Lord Civan suggested a word with which to begin a decad was when Sundarar expressed his inability to decide on the word with which he should begin the first stanza of very first decad. The Lord said, "Why do you have any difficulty about it? You called me 'Piththan,'—The Mad Person. So, start your stanza with that very word."

The third occasion of the Lord suggesting the opening line of a decad was when Sundarar felt diffident about beginning his famous *Thirutthond-ath-thokai*. The Lord came to his aid and gave him the first line, "Thillai-vaazh-anthanar-tham atiyaarkkum atiyen" "I am a servitor unto the servitors of the Anthanar dwelling at Thillai."

On the first two occasions, we see clearly that the phrase or word refers to Lord Civan. A most auspicious beginning. In the third case, it is surprising that the Tamil world, the learned and the unlearned alike, should have taken the words to refer to the legendary three-thousand (legendary only as far as the number is concerned) Brahmin Deekshithars who serve as priests in the temple of Lord Nataraja at Thillai. The phrase must refer to Lord Nataraja abiding in Thillai. Given this interpretation, the line gains a sanctity, a purity, and a poetic pinnacle without a parallel.

Sundarar has joined the holy galaxy of servitors and has become a *jeevan-muktha*, a soul which has gained *paramukti* while still abiding in a human body.

Pen, Pon, Mun—lass, lucre, land, these are said to be the cardinal desires of mankind. The moment a man is a victim to the desire for women, the other two are lying in wait for him, and it is not long before he falls a victim to them also. Sundarar, once he fell a victim to possess Paravaiyar, was no exception to the general rule. Almost immediately after his marriage to Paravaiyar, he fell a victim to the desire for land, the product of land. When Paravaiyar came to him as wife, she did not come alone, but came accompanied by a large retinue of relatives and hangers-on. Sundarar had to feed them all. He needed rice.

Kundaiyoor Kizhavar, a rich landlord, was the regular supplier of paddy to Paravaiyar's household. Sekkizhar relates:

Perfect strains of paddy,
pulses looking like flakes of gold,
sweet goodly amrit-like jelly of sugarcane,
and many other produce of land,
as provision to Vanthondar of eternal glory,
Kundaiyoor Kizhavar was supplying unfailingly,
since a long time
to the mansion of Paravaiyar.

* * *

While thus he was performing this service
on account of a fervour of love,
once, due to the sky failing
to bestow its seasonal gift,
the bountiful produce of noble earth diminished,
and Kundaiyoor Kizhavar, distressed in mind
for the loss of his reputation,
grieved his inability to fulfil
his accustomed contract of supply
of the provision of paddy.

* * *

"To-day, there has occurred a shortage
in the despatch of paddy to Vanthondar's mansion;
what shall I do about it?"
Thus thinking,
and stricken with grief
on account of a great worry,
he went to sleep that night
without taking his food;
and the Lord of the beautiful eyes
came in his dream and graciously said:

* * *

"We have given paddy to you for Arooran";
graciously saying so,
the Lord with water-seeping matted locks
directed Kubera, the Lord of Wealth,
to attend to the matter.
Forthwith, mountains of paddy,
hiding the vast skies
where rain-clouds creep along,
rose filling the big town of Kundaiyoor
to the limits of its boundaries. 3165 to 3168—E11 to 14

Kundaiyoor Kizhavar, on waking up the next morning, saw the mountainous heap of paddy, and saying to himself, "Who will be able to transport this paddy to Aaroor?" went to inform the Prince of Naavaloor about this miracle. Navaloorar too, appraised by Lord Civan of the event, went forward to see the paddy. Hearing from Kundaiyoor Kizhavar that the mountain of paddy could not be transported by human agency, Navaloorar pacified him saying, "Was it not the Lord, with locks bearing the moon, who Himself voluntarily gave you this paddy?", and accompanied him to Kundaiyoor.

Looking at the mountain of paddy
stretching to the skies,
Nambi was awe-struck,
and adored and praised the Lord,
musing that unless the Lord
who wears the cool moon
Himself provides the men to transport the paddy
to the house of Paravai of numerous virtues,
it was otherwise impossible.

3173-E19

* * *

He arrived at the temple of Lord Civan in Tirukkolili nearby with the intention of petitioning the Lord to assign men for the work, and sang:

I am one who worship You daily with folded palms,
and stand contemplating You
for a long time at a stretch;
lest the damsel with eyes like scimitars
droop and grieve,
I have received a little paddy;
but I have no men, O my Lord!
Please issue instructions
that it may be gathered and delivered to me. Vol VII.
d. 20 st. 1

A lad of no more than fifteen years he was, but he knew how to get round people, and even God. In the 3rd stanza of this same decad, he sings thus:

In one half of You,
You have kept a woman,
and in your spreading matted locks
You have kept Ganga;
goodly women's nagging,
with that too You are familiar. Vol. VII d. 20, st. 3.

In nine such powerful stanzas he pleaded for help.

" When the sun had set,
not only in the confines of Paravaiyar's house,
but filling Aaroor of note in the world as well,
Our ghouls will pour huge quantities of paddy,"
Thus an unparalleled promise sounded in the sky
by the grace of the Immaculate Lord. 3715 E21

*

*

*

And so the ghouls did. They filled with paddy not only the mansion of Paravaiyar but also all the streets of Aaroor . Para vaiyar, when she saw this miracle, informed the people by beat of drum that they may take all the paddy heaped in front of their respective houses.

Most scholars place Vanthondar in the 9th century A.D. Some, however, place him in the latter half of the 7th century A.D. Whatever the date, Sekkizhar wrote his *Periya-puranam* three to five centuries later. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that there should be once in a while an error in matters of minor detail. In stanza 3165 E 11 quoted two pages earlier, Sekkizhar, says that Kundaiyoor Kizhavar was supplying paddy etc., since a long time to the mansion of Paravaiyar as provision for Vanthondar. We are inclined to ask, " Since when?" For, Vanthondar lived for no more than four years after his enslavement at Naavaloor on the eve of his wedding. After which event, he travelled no less than 250 kilometres on foot and visited 13 shrines of Lord Civan before his arrival in Aaroor where he was a total stranger. Therefore, when this miracle happened, Aaroorar could not have been a resident of Aaroor for more than just a few weeks or more probably few days immediately following his wedding to Paravaiyar. In the circumstances, while Kundaiyoor Kizhavar could have been supplying paddy to Paravaiyar in the past and before her wedding, this last supply could but have been the very first one after the wedding, and which he could not make. There was a more compelling reason other than the failure of the seasonal rains for his being unable to meet his obligations. For, now he was no longer a supplier to the household of Paravaiyar, but one to the household of Vanthondar who after his wedding to Paravaiyar became the *de jure* head of the family. And Vanthondar was not

a free man. He was a slave of Lord Civan. If he received anything, he had to receive it from the hands of his Owner and not from anyone else. Therefore, Kundaiyoor Kizhavar had to be made unable to supply paddy. And Sundarar had to receive the supply from Lord Civan only.

Soon after his wedding to Paravaiyar, Vanthondar set out on a pilgrimage to shrines of Lord Civan. His first stop was at Nattiyaththaankudi where he was given a royal welcome by Kot-puliyaar, the chieftain of the place. Invited to grace his house with a visit, Sundarar graciously acceded to the request and was lavishly entertained by Kotupuliyaar as only a *Velaalar* of Tamilnadu can entertain. As a crowning act of his hospitality, he brought forward his two young daughters, who, in all probability, had not yet reached their teens, and begged Sundarar to accept them as his wives. Sundarar graciously declined the offer, and, instead, fondly lifted up the children to his lap and adopted them as his daughters. This was no impromptu device to escape from an embarrassing predicament. For, later on, when he sang at many shrines of Lord Civan, he signed himself in the last stanza of several decades as the fond father of Singadi and/or Vanappakai. He could not have taken the two girls as his wives for he was a slave of Lord Civan and had no freedom to do so. Lord Civan had other plans for his life. The desire for women, land, and lucre had to be exterminated in his being for now and everafter. The *vasana*, the rut made on the *atisukhma* — supra-sublime — surface of his mind by frequent traversing of the steeds of desire on the same route in numerous births had to be filled and obliterated. All incidents in the life of Sundarar were oriented to this one objective of his master, Lord Civan.

Paravaiyar was a gold-digger. She belonged to the caste of *rudrakanikaiyars*—women who do not marry, virgins dedicated by their parents to the service of Lord Civan. Again, a slave to Lord Civan. Normally, a *rudra-kanikai* should not marry. But if her owner gives her in marriage to anyone, she cannot protest. The *varaivu - in-makalir*, women who do not marry, of Thiruvalluvar are degenerated *rudra-kanikaiyars*. “Riches-desiring-bejewelled women” is a name which Thiruvalluvar gives to these women. What we call a gold-digger. This was the role created for Kamalini

by Lord Civan when she took birth in Aaroor as Paravaiyar. Not many days could have passed since Lord Civan conferred His Companionship on Sundarar before he was called upon to provide a mountain of paddy for Paravaiyar's household.

A week or two later, and three shrines further on from Nattiya-ththaankudi where Sundarar adopted the two daughters of Kotpuli-yar, at Thiruppukaloor, literally meaning the Holy Town of Refuge, famed as the place where Appar gained Mukti, Lord Civan had to meet the first demand of Sundarar for gold. Sekkizhar relates :

On the approach of the holy festival of
Panguni-uththaram —

the day on which the asterism of *Uththaram*
is in the ascendent in the month of *Panguni*

(March — April)

sacred to the Lord

with the dense russet matted locks at Thiruvaroor,
Nambi, with the intention of coming back
with plenty of gold,
to avert any lack of funds
for the gifts of Paravaiyar to devotees,
set out for and arrived at Thiruppukaloor
to worship the feet of the Lord.

3200 E 46

* * *

Going up there,
He devotedly paid obeisance
in the courtyard of the temple
of the Lord of the Devas abiding in Thiruppukaloor,
and going clockwise along the corridor,
came before the Primordial Lord

and fell prostrate at His feet, and adored Him.
Praising Him out of love
steeped in the ancient hereditary service of serfdom,
he rose and stood
and related the object he had in mind
through a decad sung to music.

3201 E 47

* * *

Vanthondar worshipped for a short while,
and, with his thoughts still lingering there,
went for a short while out of the presence of the Lord,
but did not go to any rest-house nearby
(as he should have ordinarily done).

On the contrary,
 along with his very intelligent devotees
 (who should have known better than to sleep
 within the precincts of the temple)
 he stayed at hand in the nearby courtyard.
 And, who knows, perhaps, by the grace of the Lord,
 sleep came to his blossom-like open eyes. 3202 E48

* * *

On sleep thus coming to him,
 the Lord's Companion got up and brought
 several thin burnt bricks
 used for the renovation of the temple,
 and, piling one over the other
 to form the required height,
 he spread over them his upper garment
 of shining white silk
 to form a pillow for his head
 adorned with a chaplet of flowers
 over which hovered huge honey-gathering bees,
 and went to sleep. 3203 E 49

* * *

While the devotees around him slept,
 the spouse of Paravaiyar woke up
 on sleep which had overtaken his twin blossom
 eyes deserting them,
 and seeing the burnt mud bricks
 turned into radiant heavy gold bricks,
 he praised the Lord of Pukaloor 3204 E 50

* * *

After stopping over at Thiruppunaiyoor to worship the Lord, he returned to Thiruvaroor, and, preceded by a man bearing on his head the gold bricks, entered the mansion of Paravaiyar.

Sundarar was torn between two forces — the force of the *vasana* of past lives, the force of Prarabdha, the love for Paravaiyar on the one hand, and the force of his more than human love for Lord Civan. It was a stiff battle, but ultimately an uneven battle, for Lord Civan won, but not without heavy losses and many concessions.

“ Easy come, easy go ” is a worldly-wise proverb. The five bricks were soon spent, more in a matter of weeks than months. Sundarar set out on another round of pilgrimages to the shrines

of Lord Civan. Leaving Thiruvaaroor, he visited Nannilam, Thiruveezhimizhalai, Thiruvaanchiyam, Thiruvarisil, Karaippuththoorn, Thiruvaavaduthurai, Idaimaruthu, Thirunaagechchuram, Civapuram, Kalaiyanalloor, Kudamookku, Thiruvalanjuzhi, Thirunalloor, Sottuththurai, Kandiyoor, Thiruvaiyaaru, Poonthuruththi, Aalampozhi, Mazhapaadi, Thiruvaanaikkaa, and arrived at Thiruppaachchilasiramam, five and a quarter kilometres to the north-west of Thiruvaanaikkaa. From Thiruyennainalloor, Sundarar had come a long way in worldly and spiritual life, and had visited half the number of shrines he visited in all his life-time. In terms of time, Sundarar must have spent just about one year after his marriage to Paravaiyar. He would not have been more than fifteen years old. Perhaps a few months past that age.

And thus he arrived at Thiruppaachchilasiramam. Sekkizhar is very matter of fact in relating this visit to this shrine. He leaves us in no doubt as to why Sundarar came to this shrine. He records :

Going upto the Temple,
he worshipped the holy tower, and,
going clockwise round the courtyard
teaming with Devas
waiting to have a *darsan* of the Lord,
went in, and, falling prostrate
before the Primordial Lord,
worshipped Him.
With his desire for well-being-increasing wealth
born out of love for Paravaiyar
welling up in him,
he stood before the Lord and adored Him.
On the Lord failing to bestow the wealth
he had in mind,
he faced Him, and,

3339 — E 79

* * *

with his heart sore and distressed
at not receiving the gold
on petitioning the Lord
on the strength of holy companionship
tinged by awe but not divorced from love,
with melting bones, he began his plaint, —
like a person stating his grievance
before the saintly servitors
who stood to one side
outside the presence of the Lord —
and said :
“ But there is no Lord other than He ! ”

3334 — E 80

Realising the reason for his leaving
 the eternally never-separable state in heaven,
 and for being thrust
 into intelligence-invested birth on earth,
 and grieving therefor,
 he reminded himself
 of the unique characteristics of his servitude
 which will extend to seven births and more,
 and, intending to say,
 "Notwithstanding that He refrains
 from graciously granting me the gold,
 there is no Lord other than He."
 worshipped the Lord, saying,
 "Dedicated have I solely to You, my head, my tongue."

3225 E 81

Opening his song with the last line of the above stanza,
 Sundarar sang thus with a heavy heart :

Dedicated have I solely to You
 my head, tongue, heart ;
 to You only have I been rendering
 my service as a slave to Your holy feet.
 Were I to say this,
 it would seem a sham.
 Even if our transcendental Being
 of Paachilaachchiramam,
 who goes about with a snake
 with a spread out hood
 as a G — string
 and a loin-cloth as His only dress,
 and resembles a crazy person,
 is a heartless person,
 alas, there is no Lord other than He here ! "

* * *

Mother, I would not call for help,
 Father, I would not call for help ;
 I had rested content
 that the Lord alone would suffice for me.
 Therefore, O Lord, do remember me and say :
 "Here is a fellow needing my grace,"
 and now and then do show me a little favour.
 If the Lord abiding in Paachchilaachchiramaththurai
 surrounded by ponds teeming with swans
 is one who bestows grace on His devotees belatedly,
 alas, there is no Lord other than He.

Except when I am afflicted,
I do not think of the Eternal Being ;
I remained satisfied that it is the heart which matters.
If the Lord with the poison-contained throat
and the russet locks
who was so enraged that the three fortresses
of those who antagonised Him
burst into flames,
if the Lord of Paachchilaachiramam
who bestows grace on those
who have extirpated desire,
if, whatever He may say to the contrary,
He is one Who is pleased
when He receives service from me,
and is displeased
when He does not receive service from me.
well, I can do nothing about it —
for, alas, there is no Lord other than He.

Vol. VII, d. 14, st. 1 to 4

Thus, in several more stanzas of increasing frustration, Sundarar pleaded for gold.

Sundarar once called the Lord "a seasoned litigant." The Lord seems to have made up His mind on this very second occasion that Sundarar came to ask for gold that he was a seasoned mendicant. Therefore, He seems to have hardened His heart. He did not relent till Sundarar had finished singing his decad of twelve

stanzas.- But relent He had to, and bestow on His important slave a remarkably large heap of riches.

We have presumed, on very reasonable grounds, that Sundarar was fourteen years on the eve of his wedding. Authorities on the life of the *Naalvar*, as the Four Fathers of Caivism are called, are agreed that Sundarar's total life-span on earth was only eighteen years. We have seen that when on the first occasion Sundarar begged the Lord for gold, it was to ensure that Paravaiyar was not short of funds to give her accustomed gifts to devotees during the *Panguni-uththaram* festival. We have just now recorded the second occasion when he begged for gold again. He is going to beg on three further occasions for gold. Sekkizhaar has clearly given the reason for Sundarar's demand for gold on the first occasion. But in the case of the next three occasions, he has not said why Sundarar needed the money. Why did he need the money again and again in an altogether short period of the last four years or less of his life? When did he make the demands? We know that on the first occasion, it was just before the *Panguni uththaram* festival at Thiruvaaroor. Each of the three demands following the first one must have been made immediately before the *Panguni-uththaram*, and always to ensure that Paravaiyar was not short of funds to give her accustomed gifts to devotees on the occasion of *Panguni-uththaram*. This would mean that Sundarar made the first four demands soon after his fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth years. The fifth in his eighteenth year. This explanation would absolve Sundarar, a *jeevan mukta*, of the charge of greed for money, and would similarly absolve Paravaiyar of any charge of being an avaricious gold-digger.

Several months and ten pilgrimage centres later, Sundarar arrived at Thirumuthukundram, now called Vriddhaachalam.

Perhaps a messenger from Paravaiyar overtook him there with a woeful tale of an empty coffer, a tearful plaint of gross neglect, and a demand for money. The next Punguniuththaram could not have been far away. Where would Sundarar go for the money but to his Master and Owner, Lord Civan. Let Sekkizhar tell the tale here-onwards.

Bowing low before the tower of the temple
with a huge doorway,
and prostrating threat,

Sundarar went clockwise
through the inner courtyard surrounding the temple,
and entered the presence of the Lord.
There, he prostrated before the Dancing Lord
and sang a garland of song
beginning with the words '*nangi idai*'.
and worshipped with his joined palms
held over the head.

3259 E 105

* * *

Sundarar has grown bold on account of the ready compliance
of the Lord with the former demands for gold, and now words his
song with taunting phrases. He sings:

If those who pester you with broken heart,
in the belief that to-day or tomorrow
will be the occasion
when You will fulfil their demands,
happen to die,
tell me, O Lord,
what is to be done afterwards?
If cotton is packed inside a bottle,
would it crack?
Do hasten with your grace,
O Lord of splendid Muthukundram
where, in the river nearby,
conches sound in the bordering rushes. VII. d. 43. st. 1.

Sundarar had the effrontery to ask the Lord what would happen
if the devotees who had been living in hope were to-die before
their petition was granted! In one of the subsequent eleven
stanzas of the same decad, he asks:

"Is all the wealth gathered by You and Your devotees
through dancing and singing from house to house reserved for
Uma, Your spouse, only?"

Not minding these taunts, or perhaps, on account of these
taunts, the Lord gave Sundarar the gold asked for. Twelve
thousand pieces of gold the Lord gave. Was Sundarar pleased? Yes,
pleased and yet not pleased he was. For he continued to plead thus:

All this very gracious gift of gold,
it should be arranged to be delivered
there at Thiruvqaroor
to the amazement of all those resident therein.

In a clear voice which rose in the sky the Lord said:

"Dump the wealth in the sacred River Muthaaru here,
and go to the tank in Aaroor
and take all of the wealth therefrom."

3262 E 108

* * *

Sundarar readily dumped the gold in the Muththaaru but not before he had snipped a sample of the gold for future check. Of course, Sundarar had complete faith in his Lord. Would he have begged three times for gold if he did not implicitly believe that his Lord would grant his wish? But this command to dump the gold in the Muththaaru and to retrieve it from a tank in far-away Aaroor seemed too much like a confidence trick. No harm in being careful!

Sundarar was not in a hurry to go to Aaroor. Perhaps, he thought that it would take some weeks for the gold to travel underground to far off Aaroor. Be it as it may, he went to Thillai and thence made his way to Aaroor, worshipping the Lord at various shrines on the way.

Arrived at Thiruvaaroor, he spent a few days resting in the company of Paravaiyar, and, later said to her:

"The sizable wealth
which my Master, the Lord at Muthukundram gave us.
I dumped in Muththaaru of crystalline waters;
now accompany me that we may go
and, by His grace, take it
from the tank to the west of the temple
of our Succour and return home."

* * *

"What a marvel is this? What is this you say?"
On the dame with lightning-like slender waist
saying thus with a wee smile on her face,
he who had realised Reality said:
"O damsel with a fine forehead!
That the gold will reach the tank
by the grace of my Master,
and that I would take it out and give it to you
will not turn out to be false."

* * *

With her accompanying him with great curiosity,
he entered the temple,
and, after worshipping the Ancient One
Who delights to abide there,

the unique spouse of Paravaiyar
went round the temple clockwise,
and arrived at the sacred tank
on the western side.

* * *

Then going up to the north-eastern bank thereof,
and leaving the bejewelled one there,
he of the sacred country of Munaippaadai
worshipped the Lord of dense matted locks
with joined palms,
and descended into the tank
and groped with his hands at the bed of the tank
as if he was attempting to take out something
which he had dropped therein just that day.

* * *

The handsome Lord with the sacred ash,
longing to hear a song from Sundarar,
and intent on playing a joke,
was graciously pleased not to let the high-grade gold
appear in the tank.
Thereupon, when the slender-waisted dame
mocked Sundarar saying:
“You dumped the gold in the river
and are looking for it in the tank!”

* * *

The unique devotee, the *Vaidic brahmin*
of the glittering sacred thread-adorned chest
sang a decad of praise
beginning with the words:
“O Lord with a body of golden hue!”

* * *

The burden of it was:
“Give me the gold
in the manner You graciously promised formerly,
without giving room for a derisive smile to appear
on the coral lips
of Paravai of beautiful flower-laden tresses.

3281 to 3286—E127 to 132

* * *

Here are two stanzas out of that decad:

“O Lord with a body of golden hue!

O Lord who wears the pelt of the tiger
 round Your waist!
 You burnt the fortresses three
 which confronted You!
 O You who abide in Muthukundram!
 What have you done to me
 before this damsel Paravai
 with a waist slender like a streak of lightning?
 Is this the way to relieve my distress?

* * *

“O Lord
 who, while the Devas above
 and the heaven-dwellers stood along with me,
 graciously gave me the pure gold,
 You now sit unconcerned in Muthukundru.
 This damsel Paravai of fragrant tresses
 is sore grieved;
 O my Lord, do now bestow Your grace
 that my distress may be done away with.”

VII d. 25 st. 1 and 2.

* * *

Thus pleaded Sundarar who had been shamed before Paravaiyar. The Lord did not relent even when the eighth stanza of the decad had been sung. Deeply frustrated, Sundarar wailed:

O unique Suzerain of the Devas!
 O Anterior One to all the world!
 O Lord abiding in Muthukundram!
 In the presence of this damsel,
 Paravai of flower-laden tresses,
 O Dancer,
 do graciously give me the gold
 that my distress may be destroyed!

VII. d. 25 st. 9.

* * *

The Lord relented, and Sundarar brought to shore the mass of gold to the delight of Paravaiyar and the amazement of the world. But the delight was short-lived and the amazement turned to derision quite soon. The Lord had not yet done with Sundarar. God is not mocked, or, for that matter, He is not doubted. On bringing out the mass of gold from the tank, the first thing Sundarar did was to take out the sample he had snipped before dumping the gold in the river in Muthukundram and rub it on a touchstone where he had already rubbed a piece from

the gold he had retrieved from the tank. To his dismay and the undisguised amusement of Paravaiyar, the gold retrieved from the tank was inferior in quality to the sample he had in hand. It would seem that Sundarar dropped in disgust the gold back into the pond. Sekkizhar gives a happy ending to the tale of searching in a tank in far-away Aroor for twelve thousand pieces of gold dumped in the waters of a sluggish river at Muthukundram.

Sekkizhaar sings:

On his praying again,
the dance-loving Lord who delights in the song
which arises from the love of true devotees
now showed the matchless gold
free of the deficiency in quality
and not inferior by even a fraction of a carat to the sample.
Thereupon, Sundarar rejoicingly took it
and stepped on to the bank of the tank.

3291 E 137

* * *

Sundarar set out again on a fresh round of pilgrimage. Twenty shrines later, perhaps again on the eve of a *Panguni-uththaram*, he had to importune the Lord for more gold. Twelve thousand pieces of gold have slipped through the fingers of Paravaiyar in no time. Shall we conclude that she was not the kind of a wife of whom Thiruvalluvar said:

An ideal helpmate is she
who has the requisite accomplishments
to run a household,
and runs it within the husband's income.

More probable it is that the Lord made her such a prodigal spender in order to teach Sundarar an unforgettable lesson about the bitter-sweet nature of a householder's life. Sundarar was learning his lesson the hard way, and would never again in this birth or in future births to come, if any, allow his roving eyes to light on any *rudrakanikai*. Apparently driven to despair by the extravagance of Paravaiyar, Sundarar vents his futile anger on Lord Civan. Arrived at Kanchi, he proceeded to the temple in Onakaanthanthali, about half a kilometre away, and upbraided

the Lord on His indifference to the plight of His devotees. He sang:

In the hands of those
who worship You daily
with ghee, milk and curd,
there is no money.
(My case is the same).
To me, who,
possessed by the five senses
and manipulated by them,
am sore wearied and would sink
in the deep pit of despondency
unless I am saved
through worshipping Your anklet-girt feet,
do graciously show
a way of redemption,
O You Who abide in Onakkanthanthal!

d. 5. st 1.

* * *

You do not consider that those
who cherish and praise your feet
in times when they receive from You
what they pray for,
and also in times they do not,
are people who have no support other than You
and do not take pity on them,
and do unto them
what wise people would do.
When they are destitute
and are sunk in despair,
in such times of dire necessity,
O Lord Who abide in Onakaanthanthal,
should they mortgage You
and feed themselves with the money so raised?

VII d. 5. st. 3

* * *

The Lord, no doubt, conferred His companionship on Sundarar, but He could not have even dreamed that, on account of such a privilege, Sundarar would speak in such terms. If we think on these lines, it would only go to show how ignorant we are of the quality of the love God has for His devotees. But perhaps, mortals as we are, we can but assess God in terms of our own poor love and sense of self-esteem. Unless we remind ourselves that in the master-design of ridding Sundarar of the *vaasanaa* of letting his roving eyes scan the forms of women with lustful intent,

God, in His unbounded grace, was quite prepared for such side-issues like this, we are likely to be incapable of understanding the love of God for His devotees. Thomas Merton said: "A mystic is one who surrenders to a power of love greater than human." But we wish he had also defined the love of God to His devotees. But that love is beyond definition, it is ineffable, for it is beyond the comprehension of man. God first enslaves a devotee, but soon after is a slave to His devotee. This is the reason that in the best simile available to human language, God has been compared to a solicitous mother. No, He is said to be more solicitous than a mother. Lord Civan, therefore, swallowed all the insult heaped on Him by Sundarar and gave him the gold sought for by him. And it went, as all the previous three gifts of gold had gone, into Paravaiyar's purse with a big hole at the bottom.

We have to make here a departure from the chronological order of events that we may give the continuous account of the demands of Sundarar for gold and of God's unfailing compliance with the recurring and as-of-right demands.

Sundarar had not yet done with his demands for gold from Lord Civan. We do not know whether he felt that he had tried the munificence of Lord Civan to its limit or that he should get all he could from the Lord before He became bankrupt or, perhaps, he wanted to appease the wounded pride of Paravaiyar, or he wanted to provide for her future when he would no longer be alive to bring her instalments after instalments of gold. Whatever the reason, soon after parting from Eyarkon and on the eve of the Cera King's visit to him, Sundarar went on a pilgrimage to Naagai, present Naagaippattinam, and got from Lord Civan the biggest largess he had ever got from Him.

Sekkizhaar does scant justice to this incident. In one stanza he condenses a long list of items Sundarar received on this occasion. Sekkizhar sings:

Then Nambi went that day,
and sang (in praise of the Lord) at Kaaronam,
and, after receiving bright gold, gem-set jewels,
nine varieties of gems,
clothes, perfumery, horse, golden dagger, etc.,
went to several other places
where he worshipped his lord,

and finally returned to Thiruvaaroor
where he abided.

3810—E 63

* * *

We do not know the reason for Sekkizhar dealing with this pilgrimage to Naagai in such a prosaic and bald manner. The visit deserves better treatment. This would be seen clearly on studying the decad which Sundarar sang at that shrine. He sang:

O Lord, You visit several hamlets,
sing several songs,
exchange badinage with women,
beguile them and wander about
wearing the bones of the dead,
and mounted on a bull, You roam about;
Your wealth You have hidden;
You do not take pity on me!
A string of pearls;
necklace set with scintillating and dazzling rubies
and diamonds,
graciously give these for me to wear;
do please give instructions for issue of musk
to make my body sweet-smelling,
and fragrant sandal paste too,
O Lord Who have taken abode
in Naagai-kaaronam on the sea!

* * *

With a mixture of bitter *neem*
and sweet cane,
You have put me off;
on my asking for wealth,
You sought refuge in Thuruththi.
Showing me the spreading matted locks
along with the snake,
You frighten me
and deceive me.
But would I be taken in by them?
I have been confounded once too often.
O Lord of the hue of fire
Who abide in Thiruvaaroor
resplendent with tanks
abounding in blue and pink lilies,
do give instructions for the issue of
soft silks and shawls.

O Lord who have taken abode
in Naagai-kaaronam on the sea!

VII. d. 46 st. 1 & 2

* * *
Thus Sundarar refuses to be taken in by pretences of poverty
and lunacy, and pleads:

Tell me,
when are You going to give me
a nugget of gold
to relieve me from my worries?

* * *
O Handsome One,
from perfumery to clothing and jewellery,
do give instructions for issue to me
from Your treasury.
From days of yore,
there is a document, is it not?

* * *
What is the matter with You
that You have not given instructions
for issue of silks and scents to me?
Is this an act of perfidy?

* * *
You are not saying a word in reply!
You are keeping mum!
You enslaved me
promising to make me prosper;
I am a hereditary slave unto You.
You have a lot of wealth,
You are not poverty-stricken!
Out of all that great wealth
which You have amassed in beautiful Aaroor,
if You do not give me one part out of three parts
of that monumental wealth,
I will never let You move one step from here;
You will have to mount a sturdy steed like the wind.

* * *
If You do not instantly give me
the means to keep my body and soul together,
I will encircle You with my arms
to the discomfort of Your sacred body.
Don't say tomorrow,
"This man is a merciless fellow,
a cruel fellow!"

You said, "I shall give you vast wealth,"
and forcibly enslaved me.
O Lord who, uttering crafty words,
have taken refuge in Keezhaveloor!
I will not be deceived by Your wily words;
there is Your sacred word.
You should therefore graciously give me
a beautiful golden dagger
with a chased handle,
and a golden rosette mounted thereupon,
a silk waist-band,
and, three times a day,
plenty of vegetable curry
with rice cooked in ghee!

* * *

O Great Lord
who are succour to Paravai
of music-incarnate speech,
and to Sangili and to me,
who else have I as succour?
You should satisfy the need
of Your heart and soul devotee.
Lustrous pearls, gold chain,
shining silk, flowers,
musk delightful to the eye,
fragrant sandal paste,
these I want!

VII. d. 46. 4 to 11 (extracts)

* * *

Such was Sundarar's last demand. He laid stress on his being forcibly enslaved, on which account all his needs have to be necessarily met by the slave-owner, Lord Civan only. And he got all he wanted.

In the history of his wedded life with Paravaiyar, Sundarar gave her gifts of gold on no less than six occasions. The sixth and final occasion was after the Cera King, having heard of the devotion of Sundarar to Lord Civan, paid a visit to him at Thiruvvaaroor. From this visit arose a deep friendship between them which lasted their lifetime on earth and beyond too. Both of them went on a joint pilgrimage of the shrines of Lord Civan which ended at Thiruvanjikkulam, the capital of the Cera Kingdom. The Cera King entertained Sundarar in royal style and sent him on his way home with lavish presents in gold and kind. Sundarar received the gifts with pleasure, forgetting that he was a slave of

Lord Civan. But the Lord had not forgotten it. How could He when he had suffered so much insult and indignity from the day He waylaid Nambiarooraar on the eve of his marriage, and claimed him as His slave. Sundarar was never free from the *thirodhana malam*, the Cloud of Forgetting. He did not remember why he was born on earth, but God did not forget why He had sent away Alalasundarar to be born on earth as Nambiaroorar in Naavaloor, nor had God forgotten His promise to him to rescue him from the pitfalls of worldly entanglement which would earn for him Karma and cause subsequent chain of births.

When Sundarar was passing by Thirumurukanpoondi (with his train of porters bearing the gifts of gold etc.) on his way to Thiruvaaroor,

we do not know
whether it was with the intention
of taking possession of the wealth
and giving it back Himself,
as it was undesirable that
apart from what the Lord of the rampant bull Himself
gives to Nambi,
another should give anything
and he receive the same,

* * *

On the Lord graciously willing
that His ghouls of many victories
should go in the guise of hunters
and rob Sundarar's treasure,
by the grace of the Lord
who burnt the cities of His enemies,
the ghouls went in the guise of hunters,
and rose with fury
from either side of the path Sundarar was coming by.

* * *

They set arrows on the speeders—
the bow-strings, —, drew the bows.
pierced the ranks of the porters, shouting,
“We will kill you, hand over the treasure and go!”
and robbed them of all the boundless wealth.
Whereupon, the robbed porters ran helter-skelter,
and arrived in distress
by the side of Aroorar.

* * *

On the hunters departing
by the grace of the Lord
of water-seeping russet matted locks
without approaching Aroorar,
he arrived at Thirumurukanpoondi
where the hunters also were going,
and, seeking out the temple of the Lord,
owning the young bull victorious in battle, entered it.

* * *

With joined palms he worshipped
the tower of the temple of the Lord of beautiful eyes
and, arriving at the sacred entrance
which rose up to meet the clouds,
paid his homage thereto.
Then, with welling-up love he entered the temple,
and, going clockwise round the inner court,
he arrived at the sacred presence of the Lord
Who wears the holy river and the moon on His crown.

* * *

With heart-melting love and joined palms
Vanthondar fell prostrate before the Lord
one side of whom had been appropriated by *Uma*,
and asked in a beautifully worded decad
beginning with the phrase "Blood-spilling bent bow."
"Wherfore are You here in this dreary desert
of horror-inspiring hunters robbing people?"

3912 to 3917—K 165 to 170

* * *

Here is a sample stanza out of the decad:

Displaying the bow and inspiring dread.
the hunters uttering unmentionable words,
pelt with stones and pummel people,
rob them right to their very robes:
such a place is this.
If the lack of protection
on the borders of Murukanpoondi
fragrant with the pollen of jasmine flowers
is known to You,
then, what are You here for, O my Lord?

VII d. 49 st. 2.

Sekkizhar concludes this episode with the following song:

On Sundarar singing and praising thus,
by the grace of the Transcendent Being,
the hunters brought all the wealth robbed by them
and heaped it right to the vaults of heaven

before the tall outer tower of the temple. Sundarar thereupon paid his obeisance, and, by the holy grace of The Dancer, took possession of his wealth forthwith.

3918—K 171

* * *

The wealth thus returned was no longer the one given by the Cera King, but was a gift by Lord Civan. By the act of robbery by the ghouls, it had become a possession of Lord Civan to dispose of at His will and pleasure.

This gift of wealth by the Cera King was not of the same characteristic as the former five gifts made by Lord Civan. Apart from the fact that they were gifts made by Lord Civan, they were gifts demanded and received for the specific purpose of being spent on gifts to devotees on the occasion of *Panguni-uththiram* festival at *Thiruvaaroor*. In the case of the very first gift in the shape of bricks of gold, Sekkizhar clearly states that the demand for the gift was made to ensure that Paravaiyar did not lack funds to make her accustomed gifts to devotees on the occasion of the *Panguni uththaram* festival. In the other cases, we have presumed that the demands were made about the time the festival was approaching, and for the purpose of enabling Paravaiyar to make her gifts without any financial difficulty. But the gift by the Cera King was of a totally different character altogether. It was not earmarked for any purpose. It was a gift without an aim, it was a gratuitous gift. In spite of the fact that the Cera King made the gift out of sentiment of pure friendship, nevertheless it was a tainted gift. This has to be explained. There is a story about Agasthiyar, Tamil Nadu's most ancient sage. His wife was Lopaamudrai. He went to several kings seeking financial help to run his household. For, as a Sannyaasi, he had no possessions. In seeking gifts from the kings, he made one condition. It should come out of money collected by taxes levied for the specific purpose of being spent on projects for the welfare of the subjects. Moreover, it should come only from any residue out of such collections after the projects for which the taxes had been levied had been fully carried out. He approached several kings but none of them could help him as there was no residue left with them after they had carried out the five year plans of those days. In all

probability, it was a gift not satisfying the condition laid down by Agastiyar. Therefore the gifts had to be robbed. Sundarar, a *tapasvi*, should not have accepted the gifts. It had far-reaching implications which would foil the promise given by Lord Civan to Aalalasundarar in *Kailaas*. Sundarar could be beholden to God only, and not to anyone else on earth. For Sundarar was a slave of Lord Civan.

Whether it is the depths of Dark Africa, or the Southern States of America, or the West Indies, slavery of one human being to another human being is the worst that could happen to anyone. But, paradoxically, slavery to God is freedom of freedoms. As soon as a devotee allows himself to be enslaved by God, or as soon as God makes a devotee His slave without even so much as by your leave, the roles are changed, and God becomes the slave of the devotee. Saint Thirunaavukkarasaar sang :

My duty is to do service unto You and rest content,
And Your duty is to support me.

And God has never failed in His duty. He has ever and always solicitously taken care of His devotees.

The ban on Sundarar receiving gifts from anyone other than Lord Civan was not confined to money only. Apparently it extended to food also. Let *Sekkizhaar* tell us the tale.

Leaving Kolakka the Great,
where abides the never-ageing Foremost of the foremost,
Sundarar went clockwise round Sanbai of unsullied fame,
and, after prostrating and worshipping the ground,
he praised in song the noble feet
of Thirugnanasambandhar,
the Adept in wielding with his tongue
the three branches of Tamil—
prose, poetry, and drama.
Later on he went towards *Kurukaavoor*
of the Lord Who destroyed the fortresses
of His stubborn enemies.

* * *

The Lord with an eye on the forehead,
intuiting the state of mind of the devotee,
wended His way,

carrying with Him water and a bundle of cooked rice
in the direction from which the spouse of Paravaiyar
of musical speech was coming,
sore wearied by tormenting hunger
and by thirst for drinking water.

* * *

Having constructed a *pandal*,
like a cool pond teeming with fragrant red lilies,
to ward off the heat of the sun
in the summer season,
the Lord who holds a fawn in His hand
was waiting there
in the guise of a great Vedic brahmin for Vanthondar.
While the handsome Lord abiding in Kurukaavoor
tarried there on the lookout for Sundarar,
the Companion of the Lord of Thiruvaaroor
came along with his devotees,
and, entering the *pandal*,
was greatly attracted to the holy brahmin,
and went and sat by his side,
saying, "Civaaya nama."

* * *

The Lord who sat once under the banyan tree
(as *Dakshinaamoorti*, the Guru)
looked at his face, and said:
"You are very much famished with hunger,
I will give you this bundle of rice,
receive it without wasting any more time,
and eat it with pleasure,
and drink this cool water,
and get rid of your weariness."

* * *

On hearing this,
Vanthondar said to himself,
"This bundle of rice offered by the Vedic brahmin,
it is not proper for me to refuse today."
And, receiving the bundle of rice given by the brahmin
with a sacred thread of golden hue on his chest,
he went back to his devotees
and ate the rice along with them.

* * *

After all his numerous retinue
had with pleasure eaten it,
and after other hungry people who gathered around
had eaten it,
without the unsatiating nectarine food
diminishing in the least,
the bundle of food given by the virtuous one
remained resplendently intact.

* * *

Even like the grace of Lord Sankarar,
the water was rich in sweetness.

With welling-up fervour,
Sundarar praised the Lord's name,
and dozed off to sleep
on account of his tiredness.

While those who had accompanied him also slept,
the Lord Who had hidden the Ganga-laden matted locks
disappeared along with the *pandal*.

3309 to 3316 — E155 to 162

* * *

Ramalinga Swamikal had a similar experience which is recorded in song thus:

O Mother mine sweet to my soul,
who, when I was lying weary with hunger on a pial,
came with a shining basin containing delicious food
in one of Your sacred hands,
and woke me up, asking,
“Did you go to Otri and suffer hunger?”
and graciously served me the food with pleasure:

* * *

On this occasion, at Kurukkaavoor, the Lord, apparently, was in fairly affluent circumstances. For he was able to erect a *pandal* and to await Sundarar thereat with a bundle of rice and a pot of cool water. Perhaps, even the Lord cannot afford to give away huge quantities of gold on no less than six occasions in a period of not more than four years and continue to be affluent. On the contrary, it would be perhaps nearer the truth to say that the Lord wanted to show the world and Sundarar the lengths to which he would demean Himself in order to bestow His grace on a devotee. He had once, in the case of another devotee, become a syce, a hod-carrier, and had even allowed Himself to be flogged by a Pandian

King. To such a gracious Lord, the role He was to play now was not a new one; it was his habitual role. But words fail to describe their unparalleled act of grace of the Lord. Let Sehkizhar tell us the tale:

Having praised the Lord in song,
 Sundarar stayed in Thirukkazhukkundram
 for some time;
 then he took leave of the Lord humbly
 and arrived at Thirukkachchoor
 full of fervour to seek God
 in shrines far and near.
 His heart melting with love,
 He worshipped the Ambrosia abiding in *Aalakkoil*
 girt by goldwork-abounding ramparts,
 and came out.

* * *

The time he came out
 being the time he takes his food,
 his retinue having not yet arrived
 to fetch or cook food for him,
 the hunger which had so far been absent
 on account of his absorption
 in the worship of the Lord
 now began to torment him.
 Awaiting his retinue,
 the Prince of Munaippaadi
 stayed outside the walls of the temple,
 in a place adjoining the holy entrance to the temple.

* * *

With intent to assuage the hunger of Vanthondar,
 the Lord of the Kailasa Mountain,
 Who is a medicine to the ills of humanity.
 left behind His usual alms-bowl of shining skull,
 and, bearing in hand an ordinary one,
 set out that day in the guise of a brahmin
 living thereat,
 and, going up to His devotee,
 faced him and graciously said:

* * *

“Much tormented in your body by hunger,
 you sit here quite wearied.
 To relieve your pangs of hunger,

I shall this very moment go about and beg food
and bring it to you.

Till then, remain awhile here
without leaving this place."

Saying so, He went to each house in *Thirukkachchoor*
and began to beg.

* * *

With the smear of the white sacred ash
shining on his forehead,
and the never-absent sacred thread swaying on his chest,
melting the minds of the onlookers,
the Lord with His lotus-like feet
trod the earth in the severe hot sun,
and went from house to house
for the alms they bestow at midday.
Having obtained it,
the Lord brought it to him
Whom He had voluntarily enslaved.

* * *

On the Lord offering the welcome rice and curry,
which He had begged and brought along,
and saying, "Do assuage your tormenting hunger with
this,"

Sundarar, cherishing in his mind
the quality of the great grace
of the magnanimous brahmin,
paid obeisance to him,
and received the food with great gratitude.

* * *

Vanthondar received the holy food,
and partook of it,
sharing it with the devotees around him.
While he rested happily thereafter,
and was thinking that the brahmin was standing nearby,
He whose nature is never to depart
from anything whatsoever,
departed from that place
without Sundarar knowing Him
for who He really was.

3328 to 3334—E174 to 180

* * *

The depths of degradation to which Lord Civan will let
Himself sink was to be disclosed when Sundarar, after his marriage
with Sangiliyar, went to pay his homage to Lord Civan at

Thiruvotriyoor where too He goes by the name of Thyageesar
 This marriage and its aftermath will be sketched later.
 Let Sekkizhar tells us what happened at Thiruvaaroor when
 Sundarar returned from Thiruvotriyoor.

After Nambi had departed,
 leaving behind damsels Paravaiyar,
 to her who was growing weary
 with increasing loneliness in the lovely mansion,
 nights turned to days and days to nights:
 thus time dragged on leaden feet.
 When, thus, with welling-up love growing apace,
 a few days had gone by;

* * *

and persons whom she had sent to Sundarar came back
 and informed her positively
 the true news of Navaloorar of perfect conduct
 publicly marrying, on his arrival at Otriyoor,
 Sangiliyar of well-rounded breasts,
 Paravaiyar grew despondent,
 her unbrooking heart
 seized by an anger beyond her control.

* * *

While thus Paravaiyar was fuming with a broken heart,
 Sundarar came back from Thiruvotriyoor. When he neared the
 temple of Lord Civan, his retinue, as was their wont on past
 occasions, went to Paravaiyar's mansion; but there, to their utter
 surprise, they were barred from entering the house. They came
 and reported the state of affairs to Sundarar. He sent a special
 messenger to pacify her, but he too had to beat a hasty retreat
 when Paravaiyar threatened to end her life if anyone spoke anymore
 about this matter.

On hearing about her unquenchable rage, the Companion of
 God mediated thus:

"That I may approach her
 who is the cause for this *Karma*
 which is a consequence of past *Karma*,
 O Lord who owns me,
 do graciously entertain this idea of your mind.
 If you go out there at midnight,
 and get rid of the sulks of her

who resembles a swan,
I can survive.
Failing which, there is no other way."
Saying so, he contemplated the feet of the Lord.

* * *

Could the Lord,
Who cannot bear to see
the afflictions of His devotees,
remain without redressing the grievances
of His Companion?
He who bears on His chest
the marks of the nipples of the breasts
and the impression of the bangles
on the slender hands
of Her who bore the whole world,
came treading the ground with feet
which even Vishnu, the tall one, had never seen,
and appeared before His devotee. 3477, 3478E 323, 324.

* * *

Sundarar fell at His feet, and in a tearful voice, sobbed out his tale of woe, and prayed thus:

O My Master!
If it is true that I am Your slave,
and You, to me, more than my mother,
a good Companion and my Master,
think of the despair of me
who am now out of my wits,
and go immediately this very night
and put an end to the sulks of Paravaiyar.

3482 E 328

What cheek, you would say! What colossal cheek! But we are mere human beings with standards of worldly love and its obligation. We are not Lord Civan. Manikkavachakar sang:

What is to be desired for, You know best;
what is desired for, You give in full.
True to this eternal verity uttered by the Saint of Vaadavoor
Sundarar's Lord who needs but the love of His devotees,
and desires the very things His devotees desire,
stood before Nambi who had made the request,
and, looking at his face, graciously said:
"Abandon your worries;

We shall become a mediator on your behalf,
and shall this very moment go
to Paravai bedecked with ornaments of gold."

* * *

Moved by boundless joy,
Sundarar fell at the feet of the Lord,
and, praising Him in all possible ways,
stood up quite relieved, and prayed:
"Without tarrying any longer,
please start for the cloud-scraping mansion
of Paravai of jasmine-like white teeth,
and get rid of her sulks." 3483, 3484E 329, 330

* * *

And the Lord meekly set out for Paravai's mansion, followed
by all the heavenly host. Sekkizhar records:

On the unique One of the throat
turned blue on account of swallowing the sea-spumed
poison,
impelled thereto by compassionate concern
for survival of the Devas,
on such a One impossible of being found
by the two—Brahma and Vishnu—
setting out as a mediator
towards the mansion of Paravaiyar,
on whose flower-decked tresses bees dwell,
with the object of relieving the suffering
of His devotee,

* * *

The worthy among those who,
out of all the throng of devotees
awaiting their turn near the *Devaasiriyam*,
had a *darsan*,
accompanied Him,
while the rest stayed behind.
Besides them,
untiring personal attendants close to the Lord,
platoons of ghouls,
never-ageing Munis
and chiefmost of Yogis
preceded the Lord.

* * *

With intimate Nandi, the great Deva,
and the Rishis who were accompanying Him,
along with Kubera, the Lord of wealth,
of lasting fealty,
and others praising Him ecstatically;
with showers of fresh flowers
filling the skies and the streets,
the mediator sent by the peerless devotee
walked down the blessed street.

2485 to 3487E 331 to 333

* * *

The Lord walked fast ahead,
with those who had gathered around trailing Him,
with the snake in the locks
filled with noisy wave-raising water trailing Him,
with the bees hovering oyer
the honey-laden chaplet of flowers
adjoining the crescent moon on His head trailing Him
with the Vedas trailing Him,
with the mind as well of Vanthondar trailing Him.

3489 E 335

* * *

The Redeemer of the world,
the mediator sent by Nambi,
approached the beautiful gem-set mansion of Paravaiyar,
and, while those who came along with Him stood outside,
He took the form of the orthodox Vedic Brahmin
who since long had been conducting the daily services
relating to His worship in the temple,
and arrived at the mansion all by Himself.

3141E 337

* * *

Arrived there,
He stood before the tightly closed door,
and hailed, "O damsel, open the door!"
Paravaiyar of dense soft tresses,
who was awake without a wink of sleep,
and was sunk in grief,
thought that it sounded like the Brahmin
with sacred thread-swaying chest
who performs the Pooja of the Lord, her Owner,

* * *

Seized with fear
 and wondering for what purpose he
 who serves Him with the locks
 in which the crescent moon dwells
 by performing His services
 has come here at midnight,
 and not knowing him to be the Transcendent Being
 of the holy form, half of which is of Uma,
 the damsel with a forehead
 shaped like an inverted crescent moon,
 Paravaiyar became deeply agitated
 and came forward and opened the door.

* * *

Finding at the door the mediator
 on behalf of Vanthondar
 of eternal right to the Lord's companionship,
 she saluted him and asked:
 "O Sir with a chest on which you wear
 a shining sacred thread,
 what do you want of me,
 coming here when everyone is sound asleep,
 as if the Lord who has sway over me
 has Himself graciously come here?"

* * *

He, who had hidden the chaplet of flowers
 in which the waters of the Ganges were hid,
 graciously replied:
 "O damsel, if you will not refuse to do as I ask,
 I shall tell you what I have come for."
 The lady with beautiful eyes like the carp's replied:
 "If you would please tell me what,
 I shall agree to do so
 if it is agreeable to me"

* * *

On her saying,
 "If you will please tell me first
 with what idea in your mind you have come here,
 later, if it is possible, I shall say 'YES' "

the Lord replied:
 "O damsel with lightning-like waist,
 Nambi should be allowed to come here."
 The lady with the lovely forehead retorted:
 "A very fine thing indeed!
 What about my honour?"

* * *

"Promising to come back as usual
for *Panguni* festival, he parted from me and went to
Otriyoor.

To him who has had relations with Sangili there,
is there any further relationship here?
Fine indeed is the business
you have come about at midnight,
and told me!"

* * *

The Lord, hearing this, graciously said:

"O damsel,
is it not for the very purpose
that you should not bear in mind
the misconduct committed by Nambi,
and, abandoning the anger rising therefrom,
should cease to grieve.
that I came to beseech you?
Therefore, refusal is not proper!"

* * *

The damsel addressing the Lord,
who had become the extraordinary Vaidic sage,
said in refusal:

"Your coming to my door with this as your business
is not worthy of your status.

I will not agree to the coming here of him
who has permanently settled in Otriyoor.

You too may go away!" 3491 to 3499E 337 to 345

* * *

The Lord went away crest-fallen. Sundarar, seeing the Lord
return, concluded that He had successfully carried out His mission,
and came forward to meet Him with a smile on his face and with
these words on his lips:

"You have acted today in a manner befitting
Your act of enslaving me that day in the past,
and have returned after pacifying all her anger."

3505E 351

* * *

To Nambi who said these words.
the Lord graciously answered,
"On your requesting Us,
We went to the house of *Paravai*,
and to her of buxom breasts,

We said everything about your plight,
but she would not pay any heed to it;
and even when we entreated her,
she spoke harsh words
and refused to see you.



Sundarar turned upon the Lord with words of recrimination
and said:

"After You had done in the manner
You have now related to me,
would Your slave Paravai refuse?
You have today made us understand
that we are not worthy
to be considered Your slaves!

* * *

"That the heaven-dwellers might survive,
You ate the poison of the stormy sea;
setting on fire the fortresses of the three Rakshasas
You intervened in the lives of those three
and enslaved them;
for the sake of the Vaidic lad
You flew into a rage with the Lord of Death,
and befriended the lad.
But, today, it I am one too many for You,
what will you do but come back!

* * *

You have done the proper thing;
if today, my serfdom You do not want,
what was the attraction in me that day
when You forcibly enslaved this sinner?
You have witnessed my grief,
and my breakdown.
If today You do not effect my reunion
with her of-wilowy waist,
my life will depart.
Saying this, Sundarar fell at the Lord's feet.
3506 to 3509E 352 to 355.

* * *

Lord Civan, unable to bear the grief of Sundarar, promised
to go again to Paravaiyar and try to persuade her to receive him.
On this occasion, He went with a greater following than before.

Paravaiyar, who had cooled down after her outraged outburst with Lord Civan in the guise of His officiant, came to think that it must have been Lord Civan Himself who had come in the guise of an officiant of the temple, and regretted her ill-tempered reply to Him. Lord Civan again walked down the streets of Thiruvaaroor to Paravaiyar's house. It is doubtful whether any street in any other town or village of Tamilnadu, or for that matter, of Bharat, has been so much trodden by the holy feet of Lord Civan as the streets of Thiruvaaroor, and on such an errand. This time, Lord Civan found Paravaiyar in a more chastened mood, and only too willing to accede to the proposal of Lord Civan. Sundarar and Paravaiyar were happily reunited by this mediation.

I wish I could say that they lived happily ever after. But Paravaiyar and Sangiliyar were only two pawns in the big game of the redemption of Aalaalasundarar, and his release from the bonds of the cycle of deaths and births. In spite of the momentary conflagration of the passion which consumed the heart of Sundarar at the very sight of Paravaiyar or Sangiliyar, it went out almost as fast as it erupted, giving room to the steady fire of devotion to Lord Civan, and the irrepressible desire to pay homage to Lord Civan in as many of His shrines in Tamilnadu and elsewhere as was possible in the all too short span of life left to him after his excursions into a love-life with Paravaiyar.

Since the time the *Periya-puraanam* was written in the 12th century A.D., millions of Tamilians must have read and many more must have heard in the last eight hundred years the account of Lord Civan wearing out His lotus feet in going twice down the streets of *Aaroor* as a mediator between a sulking wife and a husband with a roving eye. Many of or most of them, in their heart of hearts, were, probably, sceptical of the truth of the incident, and the very few who believed in the utter truthfulness of the incident were victims of what Aldous Huxley calls, "a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words." It is worth quoting him in full. He writes:

"Familiarity with traditional hallowed writings tends to breed not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words."

In the last eleven hundred years, among all those who subscribed to the truth of the incident, there was only one who was roused to protest against what he considered an indignity to which Lord Civan had been subjected by being obliged to walk on His lotus-like feet twice to Paravaiyar's house in the dead of night. He was the only one who was moved to righteous anger against Sundarar for this act of unprecedented indignity imposed on the Lord. He was a contemporary of Sundarar, and was no whit less a devotee of Lord Civan than Sundarar.

He was *Kalikkaamanaar* who came of a family belonging to a clan from which the Commander-in-Chief of the Cola Kings were, as a matter of hereditary right, chosen. The family was called Eyar-ko-k-kudi. 'Eyar' may be a corruption of the word *kay-kayer*. There is a territory in Madhya Pradesh which goes by the name, *kay-kayar*. The Cola Kings took their queens from many royal families in Northern India, and it is quite possible that one of the queens brought with her a retinue of people from her country who settled down in Tamilnadu, and, in course of time, integrated with the local people of Tamilnadu. In all probability Kalikkaamanaar hailed from one of those families.

Kalikkaamanaar lived in Thirupperumangalam on the eastern section of the north bank of the River Cauvery. This place is about five kilometres from Seerkazhi, and about eighty kilometres from Thiruvaaroor. Kalikkaamanaar receives just a passing mention in the chronicle of Manahhanjarar where he weds that devotee's daughter whose luxurious tresses had been shorn to their very roots on the morning of her wedding day and given away as a gift to Lord Civan who asked for them saying that the tresses would make fine strands for his sacred thread. Of course, Lord Civan did not come in His true form but came as a devotee of Lord Civan. Sekkizhar devotes to Kalikkaamanaar just eight stanzas out of thirty-seven in that chronicle, and only eight in the beginning and twenty-seven at the end out of a total of 407 stanzas of another chronicle, which, however goes by the name of The Chronicle of Eyar-Kon-Kalikkaamanaar. In the latter chronicle, the first eight stanzas, as is usual in most chronicles of Sekkizhar, mention (1) the name and location of the town of Kalikkaamanaar, (2, 3, 4) the beauty and glory of that town, (5) the family in which Kalikkaamanaar was born and its fame, (6) the birth of Kalikkaamanaar in that family,

and his devotion to Lord Civan, (7) the services he rendered to the temple of Lord Civan, and (8) a succinct precis in four lines and twenty-five words of the incident which is the reason for Sekkizhar writing this particular chronicle. The last twenty-seven stanzas only deal with the violent reaction of Eyar-Kon-Kalikkaamanaar and its near tragic aftermath to the never-before (and never-after too) heard of blasphemous and sacrilegious liberty taken with Lord Civan by a devotee.

The reason for imposing upon the reader this very matter of fact statistical analysis of the stanzas of the latter chronicle is to show that whether it is one stanza or one hundred stanzas, Sekkizhar can make them throb with life and can portray to us the innermost core of the more than human love of a devotee of Lord Civan. Let Sekkizhar tell us the moving tale.

'That Nambiaroobar,
without the least trepidation in his heart,
daringly sent the Lord
on a mission to a woman'—
hearing this news which spread fast in the world,
Eyarkon became agitated, astonished,
angry and exclaimed,

* * *

"A Liege-lord to be bidden by a liege!
Fine indeed is this thing!
And he who did this,
considering it as quite proper,
calls himself a servitor!
What a heinous sin is this!
Ah me! A ghoulish fellow devoid of any feeling,
even after hearing with my ears
this insufferable crime,
not extinct is my life!"

* * *

On a fellow,
impelled by love for a woman,
bidding Him,
walk does our Lord on the earth
with His lotus-like rosy feet aching,
and goes up and down the temple-car-traversing street
all night long,
labouring as a mediator!
How atrocious!

* * *

Even if my Lord,
 unable to resist the plea of His slave, came,
 even if our Lord
 Whom the King of those above,
 and Vishnu and Brahma could not recognise
 when He appeared before them,
 was agreeable,
 does it mean that a person should bid Him
 go on this mission?
 When will be the day
 when I will meet that fellow
 whose heart did not flinch
 from doing this?

* * *

If I were to see him come before me—
 him, who for the sake of a woman,
 bid the Transcendent Being
 who has suzerainty over us
 to go as a mediator
 in the dark night,
 I cannot say what will come to pass!"
 Thus said Eyarkon to himself
 with his heart burning with rage.

* * *

Sundarar who got this great favour,
 hearing about the feelings of Kalikkaamanaar
 supreme in the world with limitless fame,
 realized his error,
 and, seeking a solution to this problem,
 submitted it to Lord Civan of matted locks
 adorned by *kondrai* flowers
 and the River Gangea.

* * *

On his humbly petitioning every day,
 the Lord took note of it,
 and, desirous of bringing about a state
 where both the devotees of long standing
 would come together in amity,
 graciously caused a body-tormenting colic
 to seize the petty chieftain.

* * *

The colic graciously directed
by the Primordial Lord
towards Eyarkon of flawless fame,
torturing him more and more like a red hot spear,
he, broken in spirit vastly,
fell at the golden feet of the Lord of the ghouls,
and placing his faith in those feet,
prayed for relief.

* * *

On the devotee adoring the perfect feet,
with his heart and lips,
Easan graciously told our ruler, Eyarkon.
"The colic which has come upon you
and is now tormenting you
will not leave you
unless Vanthondan comes and gets rid of it."

* * *

On hearing the Lord say thus,
Eyarkon said:
"O my Lord,
need a forcibly enslaved person only come
and get rid of the colic which rends me
whose father, his father, and his father,
and all my clan
have generation after generation
considered only You as our Lord,
me who also lead an exalted life in this world
relying on You only?"

* * *

Better it is that this colic tortures me
than that he should get rid of this for me,
O Lord who rides atop Nandi, the bull!
Who knows the covert significance of what You do?
You have done a remarkable favour to Vanthondan
who has but recently come to you!"

* * *

Going up to Vanthondar,
the munificent Lord graciously informed him:
"Today, in accordance with our bidding,
go, and get rid of the colic
which has come upon Eyarkon."
On the Lord graciously saying so,
Navaloorar, rejoicing in thought and deed,
paid his obeisance to the Lord.

* * *

On the Lord's departure after graciously saying thus,
 Aroorar, according to the bidding of the Lord
 of the heaven-dwellers,
 set out quickly,
 and, actuated by a love
 arising in his solicitous mind,
 sent word to Kalikkaamanaar
 about his coming to rid him of the cruel colic.

* * *

With the colic which had come on him
 by the grace of the Lord,
 and with the distressing words heard from Him,
 both tormenting him already,
 Kalikkaamanaar, on hearing in addition,
 above the coming of Vanthondar,
 asked himself,
 "What should I do,
 if, on top of all this,
 the further evil of the colic being got rid of by him
 who sent the Lord as a mediator
 should come on me?"

* * *

He said to himself,
 "But before he comes here
 and rids me of the colic,
 I shall rip off this wicked tormenting colic,
 which has seized me in a deadly grip,
 along with the afflicted abdomen."
 Saying so, he ripped open his abdomen
 with his dagger.
 With his life, the colic too ceased.

* * *

On people who preceded Nambi bringing the news
 that he had neared the palace,
 the wife of Kalikkaamanaar, of inconceivable greatness
 and water-like nobility of character,
 who was planning to ascend the funeral pyre
 along with her incomparable husband,
 said to those around her,
 "Everyone, stop crying."

* * *

Hiding the deed of her husband,
 she ordered the servants on guard at the gates
 to dress themselves
 in their ceremonial gala uniforms
 and receive Nambi when he came.
 On her instructing them thus,
 they set up lamps and ceremonial pots
 at the massive gates,
 and hung garlands of clusters of flowers
 across the lintel,
 and went forward to receive Nambi.

* * *

On the people who had composed their minds
 going forward and receiving him
 and paying obeisance to him,
 Nambi, who has enslaved us,
 conferred on them a charming smile,
 accompanied them with genuine pleasure,
 entered the mansion,
 and took his seat with a beaming face
 On a sofa lavishly strewn with flowers.

* * *

Nambiaroorar of speech
 which reflects in its contents the four Vedas
 accepted all the prescribed courtesies
 offered to him with unfailing etiquette.
 and said:
 "I am very anxious to get rid of the cruel colic
 which has afflicted Eyarkon,
 and to remain in his company."

* * *

According to the instructions of the lady of the house,
 the household servants said:
 "But nothing is wrong here;
 he is sleeping inside."
 On their declaring so, Nambi said:
 "Even though there is nothing wrong,
 my mind is not at ease;
 therefore, I must see him."

* * *

On Vanthondar saying so,
 even after their reassuring words,
 they showed him to Vanthondar.

After seeing him lying lifeless
 in a sea of blood and erupted entrails
 Vanthondar said to himself,
 "It is good I came in;
 I too shall court the same fate
 in his very presence."

* * *

With a mind made up to do so,
 on his seizing the dagger,
 by the grace of the Lord who has him as His slave,
 Kalikkamanaar too revived,
 and, turning into a friend, cried:
 "I am ruined."

He hurriedly rose and caught hold of the dagger,
 whereupon Vanthondar bowed down to him
 and fell at his feet.

* * *

On him thus bowing down and falling at his feet,
 Eyarkon set aside the dagger,
 and humbly prostrated at Nambi's feet
 which was girt by tinkling anklets.
 Seeing this miracle which happened that day,
 the heavenly beings rained choice flowers
 while the world stood around praising them.

3537 to 3559-E 383 to 405

* * *

By bringing about this encounter between a presumptuous slave and an indignant devotee, Lord Civan absolved Sundarar of any charge of presuming upon Lord Civan's love for His devotee or of blasphemous or sacrilegious conduct towards God. For all time, Lord Civan made it clear that whatever indignities He suffered, He suffered them of His own choice and free will. Man's love for God may be more than human, but it can never come anywhere near God's love for man. In the ninth century, God walked the streets of Aaroor at dead of night to dispel the sulks of a devotee's wife. In the dawn of this era, He allowed His only Son to be crucified that man may be redeemed.

God is conceived in Tamilnadu as Ammai-Appan—Mother-Father. It is a concept unique to the people of Tamilnadu. In other parts of India, in other parts of the world, God has been conceived as a Mother, He has been conceived as a Father; but

never as an inseparably unified form of Mother-Father. The Tamil devotee addresses God, "ammaiyeappaa". In no other system of theology is God inseparably conceived as Mother-Father. Worship of God in this form is called "Samayaachaaram."

Sundarar had so long experienced only the caressing hand of the Mother. Now he was to feel the heavy hand of the Father. When Alalasundarar was serving in Kailas as an attendant close to the person of Lord Civan, his roving eyes impelled by *pooravaasnaa*, an inborn proclivity coming from past life or lives, lighted with a gleam of desire on two handmaidens of Parvati, the Consort of Lord Civan. The two hand-maidens, as we saw early in this chronicle, returned the look. Therefore, like Alalasundarar, they too were sent down to be born on earth to work out the *praaraabdhavaasana*. One of them, as we saw, was born in the south-eastern part of Tamilnadu, at Aaroor as Paravaiyar. We have seen the exciting life Sundarar led with her. The other handmaiden, Anindithai, was born in an affluent *velaalar* family in the north-eastern part of Tamilnadu, at Thirugnaayiru, a village not far from *Thiruvotriyoor*, a shrine of Lord Civan about eight kilometres from Madras City, and no less than three hundred kilometres from Aaroor. A shrine there is famous in its own right and has been made more famous by Raamalinga Swamikal of the nineteenth century who made a pilgrimage to that shrine almost daily for several years of his early life, walking on foot from his house in *Ezhukinaru* in the northern sector of the City of Madras. The Swamikal has sung hundreds of stanzas in praise of Lord Civan in that shrine. The Lord abiding there is called Thiyageesar, the same name by which Lord Civan is known in the shrine at Aaroor. Most of the songs are in the vein of bride and bridegroom relationship. He has moreover, sung a decad of no less than 101 stanzas on Parvati, the consort of Lord Civan. She goes by the name of *Vadivu-udaimaanikkam*—The Ruby of Lovely Shape—in that shrine.

Sundarar, despite his meeting with Paravaiyar and marriage to her, was blind to the design of God on account of the working of *thirodhaanam*. But God did not forget His design. Unbeknown to Sundarar, God directed Sundarar's footsteps onward and northward towards *Thiruvotriyoor*. Soon after begging from the Lord and receiving from Him unlimited wealth at Onakaanthanthali,

a suburb of Kaanchipuram, for the fourth time, Sundarar went ahead with his fifth round of pilgrimage. In this round he covered twenty shrines before arriving at Onakaanthanthali, and six more shrines thence before arriving at Otriyoor. Arrived there, he went to the temple and spent his time in singing joyously about the Lord.

Long before, in fact, years before Sundarar's arrival at Otriyoor, Anindithai took incarnation on earth at Gnaayjru as the daughter of the landlord of the village Ganaayiru, a Velaalaa by caste, and went under the name of Sangiliyar. Sekkizhar, who brought Sundarar from his birth to the eve of his marriage in four stanzas, devotes just the same number of stanzas to narrate the birth and growth of Sangiliyar to marriageable age. By this artistic economy of literary composition, Sekkizhar conveys to us the amazing speed with which girls in tropical countries grow. Let us hear Sekkizhar.

In the village of Ganaayiru,
where dwell very prosperous members
of the fourth caste,
to Thirugnaayiru Kizhavar
of high principles of hospitality,
the former Anindithai was born on earth
as a consoling daughter
by the grace of the Lord
with a throat turned dusky
by the accumulation of poison.

* * *

On the *vaasanaa* from a former birth
relating to the type of life she had led in that birth
raising up its head
as a result of unforgetting love
unto the blossomy feet
of the Daughter of the King of the mountains,
Sangiliyar, who recognised it of her own accord,
grew in age,
going through the stage of playing games
with groups of little girls
of lance-like restless eyes.

3361, 3362-E 207, 208

* * *

We may pause here to note that it is not given to everyone to know anything about their past life. Sangiliyar was one in a million. This sets her apart from Paravaiyar who was not blessed with similar knowledge.

When the damsel decked with golden bangles
grew not only in virtues
befitting a noble family
but also in godliness
to the amazement of everyone in the world,
and arrived at a stage
when breasts burgeoning to bra-wearing size
began to distress her willowy waist
with their weight,
her father said to his wife:

* * *

"We do not know the mystery
behind our daughter's physical
and psychological nature
being far superior to what is natural
to dwellers on earth.
But quite soon it will be time for us to give her
into the safe custody of another by marriage."
The lissom wife,
who resembled a vine on which virtue grew,
replied: "Give her in marriage according to our status."

* * *

Sangiliyar, who heard her father speak thus to her mother,
said to herself:
"Not fit words these are in my case:
I belong to someone
who has received in full measure
the holy grace of *Eesan*, my Lord.
Else, what will ensue?"
Thus fraught with fear,
she fainted and fell senseless to the ground.

3363 to 3365 E 209 to 211.

* * *

The frightened parents picked her up and, after reviving her
by dashing cold water on her face, asked her what the matter was
with her.

When those who bore her questioned her thus,
 she, abandoning any attempt at concealment, said:
 "What you discussed today concerning me
 will not suit my nature.
 I belong to a person
 on whom the Lord with the victorious bull
 has bestowed His grace.
 Meanwhile, I shall go away from here
 and settle down in Thiruvotriyoor
 and tread the path of life decreed by Lord Civan."

* * *

On hearing these words, her parents
 their hearts filled with
 anxiety, alarm, astonishment,
 concealed her words from others
 and continued to lead their life as usual.
 Then a person of long relationship
 and equal in status to their family,
 ignorant of this state of affairs,
 sent some persons with eagerness
 to bespeak their daughter in marriage for his son.
 And those persons went and delivered his message.

* * *

The parents, on hearing the message,
 undesirable as it was
 to disclose the real state of affairs,
 spoke to them in a tactful manner
 and sent them away.
 Even before they reached their destination,
 he who had sent the messengers,
 along with the messengers themselves,
 passed away like one who dies
 on account of committing a heinous crime
 unto Sangiliyar.
 Hearing that, those who bore the damsel
 became perturbed in their minds.

* * *

On this happening thus
 as if it was an act ordained
 to make the world know
 that those who intend to live
 would not utter unutterable words
 in the matter of the damsel Sangiliyar,

the parents told eminent people in their clan
the naked truth,
and, with grieving heart,
agreed, out of fear,
to the course of action suggested by the damsels.

3367 to 3370 E 3213 to 216

* * *

Even a casual perusal of these stanzas relating to the birth and growth of Sangiliyar will convince the reader that Sangiliyar, the former Anindithai, was a person apart. She was totally different from Sundarar, and vastly different from Paravaiyar. The latter two, under the influence of *thirodhaanam*, did not know what they were before birth on earth on this occasion or the reason for their present birth or what the future had in store for them. It is true that in the verses in which Sekkizhar describes the manner in which Paravaiyar spent her childhood, there is a passing mention of Paravaiyar singing with melting love to the feet of the creeper-like Parvati with the aim of embracing those sacred feet. We have to admit that Paravaiyar was not on a par with Sangiliyar who was evidently of quite a high spiritual advancement, ahead of even that of Sundarar.

There is another matter to which we should devote serious attention. An honest man, a man of very good social standing, sends, in all good faith, some of his relatives to ask for the hand of Sangiliyar for his son. Neither he nor his messengers were ever aware of Sangiliyar's preordained dedication to someone else of whom even her parents were not aware. Just for this unwitting act of making an honourable proposal for the hand of Sangiliyar, the proposer as well as the messengers were struck dead. Worldly logic is unable to help us understand this extreme penalty for what the world will unanimously acclaim as an honourable act. But God's will hath no why. His ways are inscrutable. "Ignorance of the law is no excuse" is an axiom of the worldly courts of justice. Evidently, in the spiritual realm, this axiom is inviolable. An offence, wanton or unwitting, against men or women of God brings down on the head of the offender the wrath of God. We can but accept God's will humbly and unquestioningly.

The parents of Sangiliyar took her up to Otriyoor and set her up in a Virgin's keep, and took leave of her in tears. Sangiliyar,

remembering the type of service she used to do as Anindithai in Kailas, engaged herself here on earth as well in the same type of service of stringing garlands of fresh flowers for Lord Civan.

Before we proceed further, it is well to note that unlike Paravaiyar, Sangiliyar neither saw Sundarar nor suffered pangs of love as her sister did at Aaroor. This again goes to set apart Sangiliyar as someone far different in temperament and upbringing from Paravaiyar, and far superior to her in spiritual development.

As the time had come for Aaroorar to wed Sangiliyar, impelled by former *Karma*, he entered the temple and soon came to the huge hall set apart for stringers of flower garlands. And there his eyes lighted on Sangiliyar. He asked the by-standers who she was. They replied, "She is Sangiliyar, a virgin dedicated by virtue of great *thavam* to the service of *Eesan*." And he said to himself, "By means of two persons, my Lord graciously decreed this birth for me. I have embraced in marriage one of them; and she here is probably the other one."

Docile slave as he was, he said to himself, I shall get her from my Lord whose crown is adorned by the golden petals of the *kondrai* flowers. Saying so, he entered the presence of the Lord and prayed in cunningly couched terms. He sang:

"Besides rejoicing with a Dame on one side of You,
O Lord, you indulge in a secret love
with Ganga whom You keep hidden
in Your beautiful long locks:
Give me Sangili of moon-like bright face,
who, while on one side was stringing
a garland of flowers,
has, on the other side, unstrung
my heart well-knit with Paravai,
and rid me of the pangs of love."

3386 E232

The Lord, as befitted a good slave-owner, promised to give her to him, and went to Sangiliyar in her dreams and said:

"Listen, O Sangili engaged in *thavam* to gain Me!
Very great love has he for Me,

loftier than the Meru Mountain is his *thavam*;
 he was worthy of being enslaved by me at Vennainalloor
 with the knowlege of everyone.
 He begged for you from Me,
 O damsel of bra-bound breasts!

Do join him in wedlock with joy."

3393 E 239

* * *

On hearing this command of the Lord, Sangiliyar addressed
 Him in trepidation thus:

"O my Lord,
 I belong to him
 on whom You graciously bestow me.
 O Lord of the heavenly ones!
 Your gracious command
 with bowed head I accept.
 In connection with bestowing me on Nambiaroorar
 by prescribed marriage ritual,
 there is nothing I have to say,
 O Lord who have as part of You
 the Shoot of the Himalayas!"

* * *

Furthermore, to the Lord with plaited locks
 she went on to say,
 with reluctant shyness and reverence,
 "O Lord of sacred thread-shining chest
 bearing marks of the nipples of our Dame,
 do graciously keep in mind
 that he stays permanently and with pleasure
 at eternal Thiruvaaroor,
 and provide me protection suitably."
 Thus said she of wisdom like an undimming lamp.

3395, 3396E 241, 242.

The Lord assured her by saying, "O damsel with golden
 bangles! As regards not deserting you, he will swear a solemn
 oath in secret." The Lord then went back to Sundarar and told
 him, "We told her about marrying you. There is an objection on
 her part which you will have to settle with her." On Vanthondar
 asking what the objection was, the Lord replied, "In order to marry

her, go this very night to her and swear on oath that you will stay here permanently without deserting her."

Let Sekkizhar tell us the plot as it thickens.

On Sundarar saying:

"I shall do that by doing which
this will be accomplished:
to that end, O Lord with shining matted locks,
I should receive Your grace."
The Prime Being, with a ready smile,
looked him in the face and asked:
"What further do you require Me to do
for you to act?"

* * *

Vanthondar who had lost his heart
to the damsel with bra-bound breasts,
placed before the holy presence of the Lord
the petition for the favour he wanted,
having at the back of his mind a notion
that such an oath would prove an obstacle
to him who was bound to go to other shrines
and worship the Lord in the forms
He had chosen to assume in those places.

* * *

Worshipping the feet of Sankaran,
the king in wielding the Tamil language said:
"When I go to You to swear the oath
which would ensure my not parting from the damsel,
You should abandon the temple
and take Your abode
under the *makila*-flower bearing tree."
Saying so, he fell at the feet of the Lord.

3400 to 3402 E 246 to 248

* * *

The Lord answered, "Nambi, we shall do as you bid us," and
went to Sangiliyar to assure her on this matter.

Approaching Sangiliyar as before in her dream,
the Lord graciously dropped a hint thus:
"O damsel, Arooran will swear the oath;
but do not agree to his doing it in our presence;

receive it under the *makila* tree
blossoming with fragrant flowers."

* * *

And she with joined palms said
with tears streaming from her eyes:
"O Lord, rare to be known by Vishnu or Brahma!
By Your graciously disclosing this secret to me,
I have been received as a slave unto You".
Saying so, she fell at the rosy feet
of the Lord with the victorious bull,
and rose up.

3405, 3406 E 251, 252

* * *

When the Lord had departed, Sangiliyar woke up, and rousing up all her handmaidens told them everything that had happened to her. Later, when it was time to string garlands of flowers for the Lord's worship at break of day, she went to the temple along with her maids. Sundarar, considering this to be the best time to make his vow, arrived at the temple and stood awaiting Sangiliyar's arrival. When she came up, he approached her and told her the divine will. Sangiliyar, however, did not give him a reply, but bashfully stepped aside and entered the temple.

Aroorar who followed her into the temple addressed her and said:
"O damsel bedecked with jewels,
please come to the presence of the Lord
with a moon on His locks
that I may to your satisfaction declare
my resolve not to desert you."
On his saying so,
her maid who had heard Sangiliyar
relate her dream, said:

"O Sire, it is not proper
that you should go here for this purpose
and swear your oath
in the presence of the Lord of the heavenly ones."
And our Sire Vanthondar,
not knowing the doing of his Lord, asked,
"O damsels slender like a twig!
Where else am I to do it?"

* * *

On the beautiful maid replying,
 "It will be quite enough to swear
 under the *makila* tree,"
 he became agitated in mind,
 and said to himself,
 "It may become a slur on my name
 if I refuse to do as they say;
 therefore, it is better that I agree."
 Thus he decided, and said:
 "If that is so, come along!"
 And when they went towards the *makila* tree,
 he went with them and arrived there.

* * *

With Sangiliyar,
 of flawless great *thavam* watching him,
 thrice he went clockwise
 round the holy *makila* tree,
 and, standing before it,
 the Prince of Munaippaadi,
 of flowers-teeming cool water ponds, swore:
 "Stay out of here, or depart herefrom,
 I shall not."

* * *

On the noble Aaroorar,
 finishing the act of making the vow,
 the damsel of blue lotus-like eyes,
 who stood watching this,
 became very much perturbed in mind,
 and said to herself,
 "By the command of my Lord,
 I, a sinner, watched this."
 Wearied in spirit
 and dispirited in mind,
 she went to a secluded place,
 and fainted away.

* * *

The Prince of Thirunaavaloor,
 after finishing his business,
 entered the temple of the Lord
 who wears the hide of the fierce elephant,
 bowed down before Him,

and, saying:

"O You who had been bestowing Your grace
on me every day,
fine indeed is what You have done now!"
went away with great joy,
loudly chanting the great name—*Na-ma-Chi-vaa-ya*.

3411 to 3416 E 257 to 262

* * *

Sundarar had been tricked into swearing before the *makila* tree, and yet he leaves the temple of the Lord with great joy. This is worth pondering over. Manikkavachakar sang:

O Lord eternal like a hill!
On the very day you enslaved me,
did You not appropriate to Yourself
my soul, my body and all my belongings?
Today, could anything untoward happen to me?
Do you good, do You ill,
have I mastery over this?

* * *

This song is never more true in the case of anyone else than Sundarar. He is the property of God, why should he worry about what the Lord does with His property? Therefore, without any care in the world, Sundarar left the temple with great joy. Thus Sundarar blocked the consequences of his asking the Lord to vacate the Temple, the consequences of his swearing an oath which he did not intend to keep, by "loudly chanting the great name—*Na-ma-Chi-vaa-ya*—a *jeevan-mukta*'s way of shuffling off any responsibility for any action.

After Sundarar had left the temple, Sangiliyar went back to the flower-stringing hall, and, after completing her work as usual, returned to her home at daybreak. That very night the Lord instructed His devotees at *Otriyoor* to give Sangiliyar in marriage to Sundarar, and, accordingly, the wedding was celebrated on a grand scale.

At this point it is worth while to pause and meditate on one feature of the desire of Sundarar to wed Sangiliyar—in fact, of all his desires, beginning from his reclamation as a slave by Lord Civan. The life of no saint other than Sundarar impels us again

and again to meditate on the various incidents in his life. The main theme of the incidents is desire, desire to wed Paravaiyar, desire on no less than five occasions for money, desire to wed Sangiliyar, desire to go back to Thiruvaaroor, desire to get back his lost vision, desire to regain the love of Paravaiyar who, offended by his marrying Sangiliyar, had shut her door on his face.

Desire is the mother of *Karma*, of fruits of *Karma*, of the seeds of rebirth. And yet Sundarar flew into Kailash in his earthly body and gained *Saayujya mukti*, release from the bonds of birth and death. Still, Thiruvalluvar says:

Desire, the learned say, is the seed
which yields unfailing birth at all times to all creatures.

This is an incontrovertible truth. Nevertheless, Sundarar gained the land of no return, gained release from birth and death in spite of desire being the recurring theme of all the incidents in his life. The solution to this paradox is supplied by the commentary on *Sri Lalita Sahasranaamam*.

In connection with the name “*Rāga-svarūpa-pāśādhyā*” (the *Devi* armed with the noose which is the personification of desire), the learned exponent writes:

“The four weapons of the *Devi* are not instruments of destruction. They are weapons which control and exercise rule over passions. Our desires take shape as means for our good, and, being fulfilled by the *Devi*'s grace, afford us content of mind. Desires which arise in other contexts become seeds for other desires just as a seed of corn produces a harvest of large number of corns. But desires which are fulfilled by the grace of the *Devi* become like roasted seeds which cannot sprout again.”

All Sundarar's desires were addressed to Lord Civan, he did not take any initiative of his own to fulfil them. That is to say, he did not exercise his free will. On the contrary, he left himself in the hands of Lord Civan. And it was Lord Civan who fulfilled all those desires, fulfilled them in a manner no human effort could ever achieve. Therefore, the desires were not seeds for further crops of desires, they ceased to be productive seeds, they became roasted seeds. Lord Civan being Ammai-appan, a

complex personality of Mother-Father, is Devi Herself. Let us remind ourselves here that the marriage for which he was setting out, the marriage arranged by his parents, the marriage which had been fixed without the consent of Lord Civan, that desire to marry was not fulfilled, in fact, was thwarted.

Before we pass on, we may profitably pause here once again to note certain special features in Sundarar's life. Born in a Brahmin *Civaacharya* family, he was brought up in the house of the chieftain of *Thirumunaippaadi*, who was not a Brahmin. Sekkizhar takes care to mention that "even after Sundarar became a beloved adopted son of a glorious king, he grew up in the traditional manner of the life of his own people." Nevertheless, we cannot disregard the fact that in the ninth century, an orthodox Brahmin boy was brought up as an adopted son in the household of someone who was not a Brahmin. He fell in love with and married a girl of the *rudra-kanikaiyar* clan, all of whom were recruited from other than Brahmin families. Soon after, he went to Thiruvotriyoor to keep his second date with destiny which was pre-ordainedly waiting for him in the lovely shape of Sangiliyar, daughter of a family belonging to the fourth caste, as Sekkizhar tactfully puts it. That is to say, the Sudra caste, otherwise called the Velaala caste.

In spite of all these social lapses, Sundarar is held in great veneration by the whole of *Tamilnaadu*, was held in great reverence from the very period he trod the streets of Thiruvaaroor and Thiruvotriyoor. How shall we account for Sundarar's actions? How shall we explain the unbroken reverence in which he has been held all along the centuries? Sundarar was a *jeevanmukta*. A *jeevanmukta* is beyond the bonds of caste and creed. Not for him the four *varnaas* (castes), or the do's and don'ts of institutional religion.

We are left very perplexed by the events which took place from the moment Sangiliyar expressed her misgivings to Lord Civan about Sundarar's faithfulness to her. The norms we know and apply to human behaviour do not help us here. The Lord suggests to Sangiliyar to ask Sundarar to swear that he will never leave her. This does not puzzle us except that it did not need Lord Civan to make the suggestion; for it would have occurred quite readily to any daughter of Eve. We also know that when the Lord

had not been invoked into the idol, it is no better than a piece of stone or a casting in metal. But what puzzles us is that Sundarar, a highly advanced soul, should have thought that by requesting the Lord to quit the idol in the temple and to take temporary abode in the *makila* tree, the idol had become mere inert matter, a soulless piece of rock or metal. For there is no time and no object on earth from the tiny grain of sand on the seashore to the lofty Himalayas, from the tiny blade of grass to the lofty oak, from the plankton to the whale, where God is not ever immanent. And yet Sundarar requested the Lord to move out of the idol in the temple and to occupy the tree as if God was not already immanent therein. And the Lord complaisantly complied with the request. It further surprises us to learn that after complying with Sundarar's request, the Lord should go to Sangiliyar and advise her to ask Sundarar to swear his oath before the tree. We know that all is fair in love and war, and we can find it in our heart to condone Sundarar's deceitful intention. But the norms we apply to human conduct do not help us in understanding God's Leela or sport with erring humanity. We can only console ourselves with the thought that God makes the norms for Himself, and that norms are not made for God. Otherwise, He will not be God and we will not be mortals. Still our uneasiness of mind is not wiped out. How can we reconcile Sundarar's conduct with his very high spiritual and moral stature? It is here that the concept that a *jeevanmukta* travels a very perilous road, comes to our help. Sundarar's plan to cheat Sangiliyar with a spurious oath was not an action in inaction. It was not the action of a *jeevan-mukta*. A *jeevan-mukta* travels a very perilous road so long as he continues to live in the body he has received in a particular birth. Dag Hammarshjold said, "At high altitudes a moment's self-indulgence may mean death." Such a self-indulgence was this desire of Sundarar to dupe Sangiliyar. And it meant the death of Sundarar, the death which brings in its train rebirth. Sundarar was caught in the cog-wheels of *Karma*. He became liable to the laws of *Karma* and the fruits of *Karma*. He would have paid the extreme penalty of losing his soul, but by the ineffable mercy of God he escaped with the loss of his sight.

After his marriage with Sangiliyar, Sundarar spent a very short time with her in blissful happiness. But when *Panguni-*

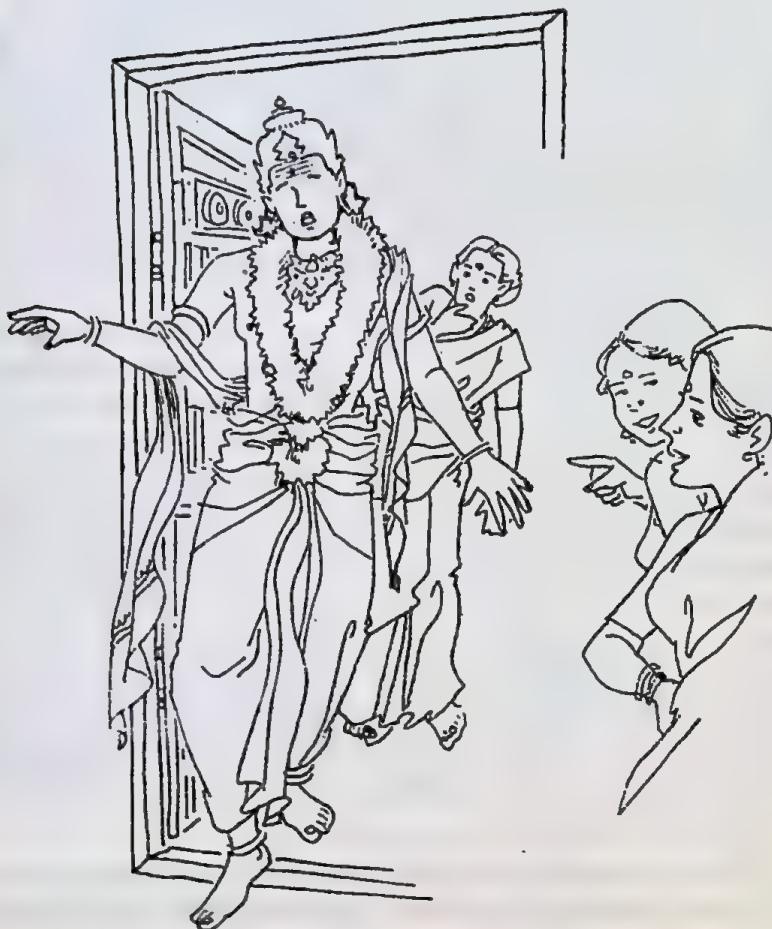
uththaram was nearing, Sundarar's mind turned nostalgically to the spring festival at *Aaroor*. Fond memories of Paravaiyar and of Thiyagesar alternately tortured him day after day till

One day, thinking intensely about *Thirraaoroor*,
he entered the temple of the Lord
who is sweet to contemplate,
and paid his obeisance to him.

Then, he, who entered the presence of the Lord
with intention to leave Otriyoor, failed,
on account of the oath he had sworn,
to see even one step ahead of him,
and fainted away when his vision failed him.

3478 E 274

* * *



There is a reason behind this instantaneity of the fruits of *Karma* following the *Karma*. There is an English proverb, "The mills of God grind slowly." There is a Tamil proverb too: "The King kills instantly. God waits and kills." These proverbs apply to ordinary mortals who would live long, and would have more lives. But in the case of a *jeevan-mukta* who trips and gains *aagami-karma* a *karma* earned in this life, it will be instantly turned into a *praarabdha karma*, *Karma* to be expiated. The Caiva-Siddhantha system of Philosophy tells us that *sanchita Karma*, being an inanimate thing, is apportioned by God to a soul when it takes birth on earth, on the principle of tempering the wind to a shorn lamb. But, in the case of a *jeevan-mukta*, God turns the *aagami karma* into *praarabdha karma* instantly instead of allowing it to be deposited in the *Karma Deposit Account* where it will be added to the *sanchita karma* already in the account. Sowing the seed and reaping the harvest are almost simultaneous like the pressing down of a switch and the electric bulb lighting up.

God is not mocked. God is both mother and father. The mother it was who arranged for the marriages with Paravaiyar and Sangiliyar. The mother it was who provided gold on no less than five occasions. The mother it was who walked at dead of night down the streets of Aaroor, not once but twice. The mother it was who put up with Paravaiyar's insulting rejection of the plea to take back Sundarar into her favour. The mother it was who begged from house to house to provide food for a hungry Sundarar. It was the father, however, who now administered instantaneous and condign punishment for breaking a solemn oath. Rather, God does not punish. We lay ourselves open to punishment, open to the working of the law of *Karma* which is inexorable. It is the grace of the Lord which tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

Why should the effect of the breaking of the oath take the form of blindness? Was it because it was the eyes which were guilty of transgression not once but thrice, once at Kailas, again at Aaroor, and lastly at Otriyoor? Or was it because that Sundarar had eyes and no eyes? He had the eyes of flesh, '*oonakkangal*' as they are called, to appreciate the charms of Paravaiyar and Sangiliyar, but not the eyes of knowledge, '*gnaanakkangal*' as they are called, to realise that God is eternally everywhere, and cannot be vacated from any place for the mere asking.

Blinded he was, but not baulked of his determination to go to Aaroor. He set out on his return journey with resentment in his heart against the retribution which had overtaken him. Before leaving, he sang thus in the presence of the Lord at Otriyoor:

I have sought the haven of Your feet
with a disfigured body;
if that too is something I should suffer from,
O Lord, do remember that people fling aside
the ball of dung fallen in the milk
and accept the milk.
I may commit offences,
but would never offend Your sacred feet.
Even if I were to slip and fall down,
I do not know any word of ejaculation
other than Your sacred name—*Na-Ma-chChi-Vaa-Ya* !
Do tell me a remedy for my eyes
to regain their sight,
O Lord who dwells in a town caled *Otriyoor* !

VII. d. 54 st. 1

* * *

We should pause here to meditate on Sundarar's assertion,

"Even if I were to slip and fall down,
I do not know any word of ejaculation
other than Your sacred name—*Na-Ma-chChi-Vaa-Ya*

Saints and devotees do not know any other word of ejaculation in injury or sorrow or anger or disgust or in joy. Saint Manikkavachakar teaches us this lesson when he sings:

O You Who assumed lordship over those
who, if they uttered anything at all,
uttered and uttered,
"Eesan! O my Father!
O Great Lord of my forefathers!"

* * *

This is not a transgression of the third of the Ten Commandments which God gave to the Israelites. He abjured them, saying, "You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain." On the contrary, what Manikkavachakar meant by his song, and what Sundarar affirmed is a declaration of the unequivocal surrender

of one's free will to God's will, not as a result of a feeling of helplessness, but as a voluntary, spontaneous and joyous surrender. Let us recall what Thomas Merton, a mystic of this century, said: "In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own free will. Yet, at the same time, his surrender is to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self." *Nama-chchi-vaa-ya* used as an ejaculation is a declaration of this unique surrender of our will to God's will. Let us therefore learn as a first step to use the ejaculation like a parrot. One day it will lead us to union with God.

Still with resentment in his heart, Sundarar continued on his pilgrimage and arrived at Venpaakam.

He went round clockwise
and, arriving at the front of the temple
of the Lord with beautiful eyes,
he praised in song the Lord's virtues,
and, standing in His presence
with palms joined together over his heart,
he paid his obeisance, and asked:
"Are You abiding with joy in the temple?"
To Vanthondar who asked thus,
the Lord gave a staff to feel his way about,
and replied, like a stranger, in words of non-compliance,
"Yes, We are here; go your way!"

3433 E 279

* * *

Relating this incident, Sundarar sings:

When I committed an offence in the belief
that You would put up with it
without minding the disrepute
which would come on You,
You covered my eyes with a film.
O Lord with the ear
from which dangles an ear-ring,
"Are you in the temple?"
When I addressed the Lord thus,
He who has a deer in His hand
retorted from inside the temple,
"Yes, We are here; go your way!"

VII. d. 89 st. 1

* * *

The Lord knows when to be an indulgent parent, and when to be an indignant parent. Sundarar continued on his pilgrimages, tapping his way with the blind man's stick bestowed on him by the Lord, and arrived at Kaanchipuram. Entering the presence of the Lord in the temple therein, he prefaced his petition with the word, "What shall this wretch say in Your presence?" and continued:

Dispenser of Mercy
 Who consumed the very strong poison
 that those who dwelt in heaven might drink the ambrosia!
 O Kaanchchi Ekambara!
 Please bear with the unwitting offence
 of this lowly fellow
 and bestow eyesight on me,
 O beautiful Lord of the colour of coral,
 that I may see here and now."
 Praying thus, he fell prostrate on the earth
 and paid obeisance to the Lord.

3404 E 286

* * *

The Lord graciously restored the sight in the left eye. Why the left eye? The Mother who has appropriated for Herself the left side of Lord Civan could not bear to see the wretched state of the erring son. Sundarar sang a string of stanzas in the following vein:

Remarkable is the way
 this slave got his eye back
 to see Him who fed with delight on the poison,
 Him, the Primordial Lord,
 Him who has the great honour
 of being worshipped and praised by the Devas,
 Him who resides in the minds
 of those who contemplate Him,
 Him, the Death to Death,
 Him whom Dame Uma of tresses scented with pomade
 adores and worships ever and always,
 Him, my Liege-Lord.

VII, d. 61 tt. 1

* * *

Sundarar continued his pilgrimage, drawn towards Thiruvaa-roor as by a magnet. Along with the blindness, another affliction had come on him. It was something like an eczema. It covered all his body. It itched and burned. Plagued by his blindness and

skin disease, he sang a decad of despair at Thiruvaavaduthurai which he passed through on his way to Aaroor. He sang:

O Lord with matted locks
on which You bear the Ganges!
O Lord of the ghouls!
O Death to Death!
O Destroying Fire to Cupid (Lust):
O Lord with a throat
filled with poison from the raging great sea!
O Lord of the elements!
O Virtuous One!
O Pure One!
O Lord with the proud bull of blood-shot eyes!
O Limpid Honey!
O Water of life!
O Lord of beautiful eyes abiding in Thiruvavaduthurai!
Do graciously tell me, "Don't fear!"
Who is kin to me here,
O Lion among the immortals?

VII. d. 70 st. 1.

* * *

Next, arriving at Thiruththurththi, he prayed to the Lord abiding there, "You should rid me of the suffering inflicted by the disease which has come upon my skin."

On him who petitioned in song thus,
the Transcendent Lord, bestowed grace,
and bade him thus:
"That this chronic disease
may be totally eradicated,
go and bathe in the waters of the Northern Tank
full of a variety of flowers
over which bees hum."
On the Lord bidding him thus,
the devotee, with no reservations in his mind,
worshipped the Lord with joined palms,
and set out towards the tank.

* * *

Arriving at the tank full of water,
he worshipped the Lord of Thuruththi,
who is the personification
of all the Vedas put together,
and entering the water, dived in.

On his doing so,
the new disease left him,
and that very moment he became a person
with a body of gem-like brilliance.

3542, 3453E 298, 299

* * *

Lord Civan seems to have fired both the barrels from close quarters at Sundarar's infatuation with women, and rid him, of the desire for women for ever.

Sundarar arrived at Aaroor without any further mishaps, and entering the presence of the Lord, pleaded for the sight in the other eye also to be restored that he might drink in with his eyes the Ambrosia that could never be drunk dry. On this occasion, he sang thus:

You could sell me outright,
I am Yours not merely by a mortgage;
of my own volition I became slave unto You.
Any wrong I have not done.
But You have deformed me.
Why did you deprive me of my eyes?
You are the One Who have now earned infamy.
if You refrain from giving me the other eye,
well, go and prosper by it.

VII. d. 95 st. 2

* * *

The Lord graciously restored the sight in the other eye as well, and Sundarar joyously feasted both his eyes on the lovely form of the Lord.

Before we proceed further, it would profit us to dwell on Sundarar's affliction and his reaction to it. Because, in the tone and wording of Sundarar's pleas is embedded the unique nature of his relationship with God. No one before him and none after him has been favoured by God with the unique bond which existed between Sundarar and Him.

On losing his sight, Sundarar's feelings are not one of remorse for breaking the promise he gave Sangiliyar not to desert her or leave Otriyoor, but one of resentment against Lord Civan for depriving him of his eyesight. This resentment did not cease till

he was back at Thiruvaaroor and had gained the sight in the right eye as well, the left eye having gained its vision earlier at Kaanchipuram.

It would be highly educative to see in one place all the reproaches of Sundarar against Lord Civan.

Immediately, on losing his eyesight and while still at Thiruvatriyoor, Sundarar addresses Lord Civan thus:

O Lord who has three eyes,
if depriving me, Your devotee, of my eyes
is the esablished procedure,
do graciously give me a staff
to be of help to me.

* * *

I am truly trying to tread the righteous path;
I will not consider myself a match to You.
Like water in a whirlpool,
my heart whirls and whirls about:
Spare me the plight
of a man taking hold of the staff
and violently dragging me along
as a dog-catcher drags a pi-dog
at the end of a stick with a noose.

(VII. d. 54, st. 4 & 5)

* * *

At Thirumullaivaayil, the next shrine in his pilgrimage back to Thiruvaaroor, he varies the argument in his pleading; He sings:

O Munificent One,
Who else could ever receive
all the favours I have received from You?
On account of Your Principle
of taking as deeds of virtue
even if I speak nothing but perfidy
and commit nothing but offences,
I committed many excesses.

VII. d. 69 st. 6

* * *

At Thiruvenpakkam, the next shrine, he brings up another excuse. He sings thus:—

When I, Your slave, committed an offence
in the belief that
You would put up with the offence,

You, unmindful of the ignominy
which would come on You,
have covered up my pupils with a film.

VII. d. 89, st. 1

* * *

At Thiruvaalangaadu, he sings:

Falling into the trap of women with wide eyes
which dart like a spear,
I forgot the path of righteous conduct
laid down by You,
and, falling a victim to delusion,
I forgot myself.

VII. d. 52 st. 5

* * *

and played false to Sangiliyar.

At Kanchi, the next shrine, Lord Civan graciously restored the sight in the left eye, and Sundarar, for the moment, was in a less truculent mood, and sang:

Wonderful is the manner
this slave got his eyesight back
that he might worship Ekamban, our Lord!

VII. 3. 61. st. 1

* * *

Wherever Sundarar was, Thiruvaaroor was never out of his mind. He was always homesick for *Thiruvaaroor*. This nostalgic emotion now made him sing:

When am I to enter Thiruvaaroor
which my mind is always thinking of,
and gain the feet of my Lord,
repeating morning and evening
and at mid-noon too
the Mystic Five letters
before the ancient *Karma*.
which desires to forestall my attempt,
rises and engulfs me?

VII. d. 83, st. 1

* * *

Sundarar is still gratefully jubilant at the restoration of sight in one eye when he arrives at Thirummaaththoorn which is the next shrine on his way back to Thiruvaaroor. He sings in an exultant mood:

I saw, I saw Him
 Who is the heart's desire of beautiful *Uma!*
 He enslaved, enslaved me.
 I adorned my head, I adorned my head
 with the feet of the Lord
 abiding in Aamaaththoor.
 I would not tell a lie;
 do listen to me.
 Withdraw I did, withdraw I did
 from the company of those
 who are not learned in the Vedas!

VII. d. 45, st. 1

* * *

But this euphoria lasts but a while. At the next shrine, at Thirunelvaayil-araththurai, he bemoans:

One eye I have not,
 other succour than You I have not,
 O Immaculate One of Nelvaayil-araththurai!

VII. d. 3, st. 3

* * *

A new disease has now appeared, a skin lesion, to plague Sundarar already despondent over the non-restoration of sight in the other eye. Heavy in heart, he sings at Thiruvaavaduthurai, the next shrine on his way back to Thiruvaarloor:

O Lord Who came forward of Your own accord
 and enslaved me
 who was wallowing deludedly on earth,
 already I am sightless;
 now my heart is sore grieved
 by a disease which has afflicted my body.
 O Lord abiding in Thiruvaavaduthurai,
 do graciously say, "Fear not!"
 Who else is kin to me,
 O Lion among the immortals!

VII. d. 70. st. 1.

* * *

The Lord took pity on him and graciously cured him of the skin lesion. Once again, Sundarar is in a grateful mood when he arrives at Thiruththurthi where the song by him is laden with gratitude for benefits received. He petitions for further relief.

At last, he is at Thiruvaaroor, his spiritual and worldly haven.
Entering the temple, he pleads in song thus:

You robbed me of my eye;
now, restore it to me
and reveal Yourself to me.

* * *

In another decad, he bitterly upbraids the Lord thus:
When Your devotees tell their woes to You,
You remain unmoved here.

O Lord of Thiruvaaroor,
all right, go ahead, and prosper!

VII. d. 95. st. 1

* * *

When Your devotee,
who sings your praises
ever and always without remission,
knocks against hillocks
or fall into pits,
if You profit by it,
all right, go ahead and prosper!

VII. d. 75. st. 3

* * *

At last the Lord relented and restored the vision in the right eye also. By the loss of his vision, Sundarar learnt a bitter lesson the hard way. God is not mocked! His name should not be taken in vain. This is the lesson that these decads teach us.

But we should not fail to see Sundarar's side of the incident of the breaking of the vow made before the *makila* tree. His plea is based on the privileges of a companion. The Law he quotes is the Chapter on "Intimacy" with which Thiruvalluvar crowns his series of three chapters on Friendship. From beginning to end, Sundarar's life is an eloquent thesis on this chapter of the *Thirukkural*.

Sundarar's life was uneventful from now onwards except for the interlude of Paravaiyar's sulks and the Lord Himself acting as mediator. We have already dealt with this unparalleled act of grace of the Lord.

While Sundarar spent his time in loving peace with Paravaiyar and in unremitting devotion to Lord Civan, a king of the Cera

Dynasty in far away Thirunajaikhalam had an extraordinary experience which prompted him to seek out Sundarar and gain his friendship. Anjaihhalam, which went by the name of *Kodungal-loor* also, was the capital of the Cera Kingdom. It also went by the name of Mahothai. It is thirty-four kilometres by steamboat from Ernakulam which is less than eight kilometres from Cochin Harbour. Here, in the family of the Cera Kings was born Perumaa-hhothaiyaar. He grew up to be a very great devotee of Lord Civan. When the reigning Cera King happened to die, he had to ascend the throne much against his will as he was the next in the line of succession. A king he became, but he never ceased to be the same ardent devotee of Lord Civan. So great was his devotion that when once on a state ride through the streets of his capital, he saw a person smeared from head to foot with a white substance coming towards him, he slid down from his elephant and prostrated before the person whom he took to be a devotee of Lord Civan smeared all over with the sacred ash. That person, alarmed and agitated, prostrated in his turn and stammered out "I am a washerman, your obedient servant." The King without the least embarrassment responded, "I am the Cera King, your devoted servant. Go in peace." He was not in the least upset by his error in prostrating before a washerman whose whole body was covered by Fuller's earth which had dripped from a rain-drenched bag of that article that he was carrying on his head.

This pious king was in such favour with Lord Civan that He sent to the king a penurious poet, Paana-Paththiranaar by name, with a letter of recommendation which is called today "The Sacred Epistle." The Lord wrote:

"These are the words uttered by Me, Civan,
Who abide in Aalavaail in whose groves white-plumed
swans sport.

Situated in the town of Koodal
it has mansions on whose turrets
the moon grazes on its way in the sky.

Let the Cera King.
who, seated under a huge brilliant moon-like royal
umbrella,
rides on a war-elephant,
and, like a seasonal rain-cloud,
showers largesses on poets

by virtue of right on either side of his clan,
pay attention.

Paanapaththiran,

a skilled player on the *Yaazh*,
and, even like you, a devotee unto Me,
is going to Anjaihhalam to see you.

Give him munificent riches
and send him back to Me."

* * *

Never before or never after this unique occasion has any devotee received a missive like this.

So great was the Cera King's devotion and spiritual attainments that when he performed his daily worship and was lost in contemplation of Lord Civan, he would have an extraordinary phonic experience. He would hear the tinkling of the anklets on the legs of Lord Civan as He danced in the Golden Hall in Thillai, modern Chidambaram. This experience had become so much an integral part of his daily worship that he was overwhelmed with grief when, one day, he ceased to hear the anklets. Forthwith, he decided to put an end to his life with his dagger. The Lord hastened to let him hear loudly the tinkling of the anklets. On hearing the tinkling anklets, he put aside his dagger and, with joined palms held over his head, fell prostrate on the ground and, after adoring the Lord for a long while, asked: "O Lord difficult for Vishnu and Brahma to find , why did You not bestow this grace on me earlier?"

A voice from the sky answered: "Vanthondan had come to Our Hall, and, with dedicated fervour, was singing Our praises. We stood hearing him and were therefore, late in coming here." The curiosity of the Cera King was aroused, and he set out immediately to see this extraordinary devotee whose song had captivated the Lord. They met and became bosom friends.

They went together on a pilgrimage up to Rameswaram and returned to Aaroor. Once again they set out on another round of pilgrimage. Thiruvaiyaaru was the second shrine visited on this occasion. The River Cauvery in floods parted to let the devotees pass to the shrine, and parted again to let them depart. Sundarar now accompanied the Cera King to Anjaihhalam. After staying a short while with him, Sundarar set out for Aaroor. We have seen how on his way to Thirumuruhanpoondi he was robbed of all the

treasures the Cera King had given him as gifts and how they were restored to him at Thirumuruhanpoondi.

Arrived at Thiruvaaroor, Sundarar did not tarry long before he set out on his last pilgrimage. When he had arrived at Thirupuhholiyoor, he saw a paradoxical sight as he was passing down a street. In one house there were sounds of rejoicing, and from the opposite house rose sounds of mourning. He asked the bystanders for the reason. He was told that a few years ago the two little boys of the two households had gone to a tank for a bath. A crocodile snatched up one boy and swallowed him while the other ran back in terror to his house. Today, they said, that boy's *upanayanam* was being performed in his house, while the parents of the dead boy mourned the loss of their son, whose sacred thread ceremony too would have been held that day, had he not been swallowed by the crocodile.

“The ascetics are the compassionate ones
since they act with compassion
towards every living thing.”

said Thiruvalluvar. Perfect ascetic—*jeevanmukta*—as Sundarar was, he was the very embodiment of compassion. His very being was torn by grief for the grieving parents as if the lost son had been his own son. He stood rooted to the spot, a very embodiment of empathy. The bereaved parents came out and, forgetting for the moment their own grief, fell down and prostrated at his feet. Deeply touched by their pleasure at his coming, he vowed that he would worship the feet of Avinaasi, the name by which Lord Civan went at Puhholiyoor, only after he had restored the lad to his parents. Then, he enquired from the bystanders the way to the pool and was taken there. Standing at the edge of the pool, he petitioned the Lord thus:

O Avinaasi abiding in Puhholiyoor
abounding in forests and groves!
O Lord who delights in the hymns of the hymnographer!
O Lord who dwells in the thousand-petalled lotus
at the top of the brains of those
who contemplate You!
O Lord who is the beginning
and end of everything!
Do bid the Lord of death and the crocodile
to deliver the child on the bank of this pool!

Hardly had the last word of the decad of ten stanzas been sung, lo, behold! the crocodile came up to the bank and disgorged from its maw the child who had lain many years inside its body. The child who was thus delivered had as much growth in height and weight as his companion whose *upanayanam* was being



performed that day. The mother, beside herself with joy, gathered up the boy in her arms and, followed by a cheering crowd, went with Sundarar and her husband to the temple where they paid their homage to the Lord. Sundarar stayed to perform the *upanayanam* of the boy and later left on his way to the capital of the Cera King.

Many have claimed to have raised the dead to life. But only a few have been known to have done so. They have always been the chosen of God. It has been said before that the chosen of God fall into three categories. The Servitors of God, The Sons of God, and the Companions of God. Saint Thirunavukkarasar was the Servitor of God. He brought back to life the son of

Appoothi Atihal who had died of a snake-bite. The saint came on the scene within a few minutes of the death of the boy. Saint Thirugnanasambandhar was the son of God. He brought back to life the lover of a girl, both of whom had eloped together from their village. To elope was an honourable way of life in those days. The saint did not sit in judgement on the girl. He restored her lover to her. Here too, this saint was on the scene not very long after the death of the young man. But in the case of the restoration to life of the girl who had been cremated and whose ashes had been preserved in an urn by the fond father, because he had heard that Thirugnanasambandhar would be passing that way quite soon, and had therefore, hoped that she might be restored to life by the child saint, there was a time lapse, but it could not have been of any appreciable length. Sundarar was the Companion of God. He restored to the parents their son who had been swallowed by a crocodile several years back, and whosebody hadlain in the creature's maw since then. And the child had not missed the growth of the years It had lain in the maw of the crocodile! We can only wonder if there is any connection between the length of the time lag and the category to which the saint belonged?

By conferring this unique power on a devotee, it would seem that God announces to the world that the devotee is the chosen of God. Cynics, scoffers and sceptics notwithstanding, it is true that the dead can be and have been brought back to life. There is, however, one indispensable condition to such a happening. The power should be exercised out of compassion, and in utter faith in God.

Sundarar was received with royal honours by the Cera King at his capital. While Sundarar was spending his days there in prayer and pilgrimage, the Lord God decided to call him back, and bade the Devas to take the Iraavatham, Indra's albino elephant, and bring Sundarar mounted on that elephant. They obeyed the mandate and arrived at Anjaihhalam with the elephant. Sundarar duly mounted it and flew towards Kailasa, his last thought being about his royal friend. The Cera King, on hearing about the departure of Sundarar, mounted his royal steed, which, on his whispering in its ear the Five Mystic Letters—*Na-Ma-Chchi-Vaa-Ya*—rose up in the air and soon overtook Sundarar's elephant, and

passing on the skyway to the right of the pachyderm, arrived at Kailasa before Sundarar, whom he, along with the Devas, received a little later.

It was this phenomenon of Sundarar's ride across the sky which the disciples of the sage Upamanyu saw, and which the sage explained to them thus:

Prince Naavalar, the famous Vanthondan
who had been to the south
is going towards Kailasa
by the grace of our Father, Lord Civan.

2. THE SON OF GOD

Isvarakoti—Thirugnana-sambandhar, the Child Saint of Tamilnadu, was an *Isvarakoti*.

Who is an *Isvarakoti*? Let Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa answer:¹

“An incarnation of God, or one born with some of the characteristics of an incarnation, is called an *Isvarakoti*. An ordinary man is called a ‘*jiva*’ or ‘*jivakoti*’. By dint of *sadhana*, a *jivakoti* can realise God; but after *samadhi* he cannot come back to the plane of relative consciousness. The *Isvarakoti* is like the king’s son. He has the keys to all the rooms of the seven-storey palace; he can climb to all the seven floors and come down at will. A *jivakoti* is like a petty officer. He can enter some of the rooms of the palace; that is his limit.”²

* * *

“There are two classes of devotees: *jivakotis* or ordinary men, and *Isvarakotis* or Divine Messengers. The *jivakoti*’s devotion to God is called *vaidhi*, formal; that is, it conforms to spiritual laws. He worships God with a fixed number of articles, repeats God’s holy name a specified number of times, and so on and so forth. This kind of devotion, like the path of knowledge, leads to the knowledge of God and to *samadhi*. The *jivakoti* does not return from *samadhi* to the relative plane.

“But the case of the *Isvarakoti* is different. He follows the process of ‘negation’ and ‘affirmation’. First he negates the world, realising that it is not Brahman; but then he affirms the same world, seeing it as the manifestation of Brahman. To give an illustration: a man wanting to climb to the roof first negates the stairs as not being the roof, but on reaching the roof he finds that the stairs are made of the same materials as the roof; brick, lime, and brick dust.

1. Extracts from “The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.”

2. ibid, page 727

Then he can either move up and down the stairs or remain on the roof as he pleases.”³

* * *

“There are different planes of consciousness, the gross the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause. Entering the *mahākāraṇa*, the Great Cause, one becomes silent, one cannot utter a word.

“But an *Isvarakoti*, after attaining the Great Cause, can come down again to the lower plane. Incarnations of God and others like them belong to the class of *Isvarakotis*. They climb up and they can also come down. They climb to the roof, and they come down again by the stairs and move about on a lower floor. It is a case of negation and affirmation.”⁴

“None but the *Isvarakotis* can return to the plane of relative consciousness after attaining *samadhi*. Some ordinary men attain *samadhi* through spiritual discipline; but they do not come back. But when God Himself is born as a man, as an incarnation, holding in His hand the key to others' liberation, then, for the welfare of humanity, the Incarnation returns from *samadhi* to consciousness of the world.”⁵

“Once Rama was pleased with a prayer of Narada and told him to ask for a boon.... Narada replied: ‘I don't want anything else. I pray only for pure love. How can a devotee attain such love?’ Rama replied: ‘First, the company of holy men. Then comes *nishtha*, single-minded devotion to the ideal. (In that stage the devotee does not like to hear anything but talk about God. He performs only those acts that please God). After *nishtha* comes *bhakti*, devotion to God; then comes *bhava*,⁶ Next,

3. ibid, page 681

4. ibid, page 524. The translator of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* says in a note to this passage; “That is to say, the aspirant negates the world at first on account of its not being God, but after divine realisation he accepts the same world as the manifestation of God Himself.”

5. Ibid, page 175

6. *bhava*—existence, feeling, emotion, ecstasy, *samadhi*; also denotes one of the five attitudes that a dualistic worshipper assumes towards God. The first of these attitudes is that of peace; assuming the other four, the devotee regards God as Master, Child, Friend, or Beloved.

mahābhāva,⁷ then *prema*,⁸ and last of all the attainment of God Himself. Only for *Isvarakotis*, such as the incarnations, it is possible to have *mahābhāva* or *prema*.⁹

"Every one is under the spell of this world-bewitching *maya*. When God assumes a human body, He too comes under the spell. Rama wandered about weeping for Sita: 'Brahman weeps entangled in the snare of the five elements.' But you must remember this; God, by His mere will can liberate Himself from this snare."

A disciple: "The guard of a railway train shuts himself up of his own will in a carriage; but he can get out whenever he wants to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The *Isvarakotis*—Divine Incarnations—for instance, can liberate themselves whenever they want to, but the *jivakotis* cannot. *Jivas* are imprisoned by 'woman' and 'gold'. When the doors and windows of a room are fastened with screws, how can a man get out?"¹⁰

Thirugnana-sambandhar was an *Isvarakoti*, such an *Isvarakoti* as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has defined above. The circumstances attending his entry into this earth and his departure therefrom, and his exceedingly short span of life, all go to prove that he was an *Isvarakoti*.

A childless man usually prays for a son that he might perform the obsequies for him according to the *sastras*. Some pray for a son to take care of them in their old age. But Civa-pada-hirudayar prayed for a most unusual reason, one may say, a unique reason, never put forward before or after. Sekkizhaar testifies thus:

Seeing the false propaganda of the Jains and the Buddhists spread far and fast in the world,
and the traditional practices
of the Holy Vedas decline,
and noticing furthermore, the abandonment
of loving display of the sacred ash
on their bodies by the devotees of Haran

7. Mahabhava—the most intense ecstatic love of God.

8. Prema—supreme love

9. *ibid*, page 460

10. The above extract is part of a talk by Sri Ramakrishna to his inner circle of devotees.

Civa-pada-hirudayar of unsullied repute
was grievously distressed.

1916-18

* . * *

Desirous of begetting a son
who brings delight to the married state,
he established himself in a suitable posture,
and, meditating on the lotus—
the eternally dancing feet of Lord Civan—
performed laudable austerities
for begetting a beloved son
adorned with gem-set jewels,¹¹
who would destroy the very structure
of alien religions,
and reduce them to ashes.

1917-19

* * *

The prayer of Civa-pada-hirudayar — he who had the feet
of Lord Civan lodged in his heart—and his wife, Bhagavathiyar
was heeded. And,

On the exceedingly auspicious day
of the *Athirai* asterism,
as the goodly hour
when the sun and the rest of the planets
were beautifully in the ascendent
with great power (for good),
that the pride of alien religions
might be destroyed,
that *Caivism* and *Vedantism* might flourish
and prevail over other religions,

* * *

that the hearts of devotees might rejoice,
that the tradition of wearing the pure sacred ash
might be solely followed
in all the eight directions of the earth,
that the seven worlds might be filled with joy,
might be overwhelmed with wonder,
that the sacrificial offerings by Brahmins
might increase,

11. Correctly speaking, the clause should read "Who would in later life, be adorned with gem-set jewels." Sekkizhaar, with poetic skill, reverses the time element to convey the anticipatory eagerness of Civa-pada-hirudayar.

that the object of the *thavam* performed
by versatile Tamil might be fulfilled,
that men of great austerities
might have scope to perform their deeds,

* * *

that the Southern Region
might surpass the glory of all other regions
in the rest of the directions,
and progress further,
that, the earth might uniquely prevail
over the world above and other worlds as well,
that the unassailable fertile Tamil Culture
might prevail over alien cultures,
that in all music and song,
the theme of knowledge of Reality
might occupy the central place,
and spread apace,

* * *

that the quality of creative arts
might attain eminence.
that the evil prevalent in the present
and in the future might be eliminated,
that the progressive City of Kaazhi
of important thoroughfares
teeming with life might prosper,
that the Grace of the Lord
seated on the sacred boat,
who has me as His slave,
might increase.

* * *

that the rebirth-increasing false doctrines,
alien religions
like the evil-multiplying Jainism etc.,
might be ruined,
the venerable Son of God
who makes manifold the flawless bliss
of the mobile and immobile creatures
incarnated himself in Sembai¹²
which from aeon to aeon surpasses itself
in its repute for *thavam*.

1920-1924: 22-26

* * *

12. Sembai—one of the twelve names of Kaazhi.

Such were the purposes for which Thirugnana-sambandhar was born, born not like other human beings, through the workings of the Law of Karma, but of his own volition, and the sacred will of God to rid Tamilnadu of a persecuting and proselytizing Jainism, and to re-establish Caivism and Vedantism. Sekkizhaar, from whose hagiography the above account has been taken, gives Tamil and Tamil Culture an important place in the reasons for the *avataar* of Thirugnana-sambandhar. We shall examine later the relevancy of this issue.

A soul takes abode in a human body and is born through the womb of a woman. This is as a result of the Law of Karma. Such souls have yet to go a long or short way to gain perfection, to achieve extirpation of desire, to gain what is called in Tamil '*iru vinai oppu*' or '*mala paripaakam*', that is, a stage when they do not accrue good or bad Karma, when they are beyond the world of good and evil. Therefore, such persons, be they ordinary persons or saints or mystics, have to go through the three stages of Pathway to God—the stage of purgation, the stage of illumination, and the stage of union with the Godhead—not when dead but while still living in the human body. When some such persons become vocal, and sing spontaneously devotional songs, their utterances are, in the earliest stages of the journey on the Pathway to God, filled with self-accusations of all the venial and cardinal sins. Such was the case with Manikkavachakar and Saint Ramalingar. But even the most diligent research in the four thousand and odd stanzas of Thirugnana-sambandhar will fail to reveal any word of self-reproach self-accusation, self-denigration. For he was an *Isvarakoti*, But this does not mean that he was an *avataar* of Lord Civan. Not by any means. Civan does not take birth on earth through the womb of a woman. An *Isvarakoti*, a soul which had gained freedom from the cycle of births and deaths and had gained apprehension of the Godhead, takes birth on earth out of unique compassion towards humanity. Even so did Thirugnana-sambandhar.

As if he wished to underline this aspect of the birth of Thirugnana-sambandhar, Sekkizhaar, in his description of the incident of the investiture of Sambandhar with the sacred thread, sings a significant poem:

Classing him
with the rest of the people of the world—

him who was blessed with the state
of not having any birth at all—
the Vaidic sages made a show with rites
and the formality of investiture with the sacred thread,
his attainment of the status of the twice-born,
and declared:
“We bestow on you (the right to) the Four *Vedas*
handed down from ages past,
generation by generation.”
To them who declared thus
with the chanting of *mantras*,
the Meritorious One who incarnated in Pukali
uttered in his sweet voice
in an inimitable manner
innumerable *Vedas*
which sanctify (the utterer and the hearers).

2162-264

* * *

Sekkizhaar does not tell us the name which was given to the child on the eleventh day after its birth when it was ceremonially laid in a cradle for the first time and was rocked to sleep to the melody of a softly sung lullaby.

Twenty-nine stanzas later, Sekkizhaar introduces us to the name, ‘*Sambandhar*’ in a poem which relates the quality of the gnosis (spiritual knowledge) which Sambandhar received when he was fed with the milk drawn from the breast of the Mother of all creation. Sekkizhaar sings:

A *Civa-gnaanam*
(Knowledge, gnosis, apprehension of Civan)
which ceaselessly increases
the blessing of meditation—
of the Feet of Civan alone,—
a gnosis eminent in radically eradicating (future) birth,
a matchless gnosis of all the arts,
a gnosis of Reality, rare to be experienced—
chief among *tapasvis* (sages),
Sambandhar (with his whole being)
experienced at that moment.

1968-70

* * *

Apparently, Lord Civan Himself wished to invest His son with a name. This He did when He appeared to the priests of the temple at Araththurai in their dreams to instruct them to endow His

son with a palanquin, an umbrella, and trumpets to herald his coming to any shrine. The Lord said:

Gnana-sambandhan is coming to Us;
 Palanquin decked with pearls,
 an umbrella strung with gems,
 long trumpets,
 receive them from Us;
 with these approach the Prince
 of the rarest of the arts, (Civagnanam)
 and bestow them on him.

2095-197

* * *

Thus Lord Civan bestowed a name on His son even as He bestowed names, such as Manikkavachakar, Navukkarasar, and Vanthondan on the other three of the Four Fathers of the Faith, but with one difference. The others were given names by their parents at birth, but Sambandhar was not given a name by his parents. At least, Sekkizhaar does not mention such an incident.

Again, this sets Sambandhar apart from the other three. Sambandhar was an *Isvarakoti*, theologians notwithstanding.

Research scholars have made a hit or miss guess at some dates—not for Thirugnana-sambandhar—but for Thirunavukkarasar who was a contemporary of Thirugnana-sambandhar. Thirunavukkarasar, who was lovingly hailed by Thirugnana-sambandhar at their very first meeting as “*Appare*”—“O Daddy”—lived for eighty-one years, right through the reign of two kings who lived in the seventh century A.D. Therefore, he straddled the seventh century, with one leg in 1610 and the other in 1691. The seventh century A.D. may well be called the “Appar Century”. Nearly a dozen of the sixty saints listed by Sundaramoorthy Swamikal in his *Thiruththondathokai* and sung about by Sekkizhaar in his *Thiruththonda-puranam*, the hagiography of the saints of Tamilnadu, were contemporaries of Appar. Appar met Thirugnana-sambandhar for the first time almost immediately after the latter had been invested with the sacred thread, in all probability, in his seventh year. Appar would have been not less than forty or more at that time, right in the middle of his span of life of eighty-one years. So it may be assumed that Thirugnana-sambandhar, who was just a year short of the half span of his life of sixteen years when he met Appar, was born in

643 A.D., and that he entered the Effulgence that is the Godhead in 659 A.D. on his wedding day, with all the assembled guests accompanying him into the same Effulgence.

Like any other only child, especially a child born as a result of austere *thavam*, Thirugnana-sambandhar was petted and fondled as he grew from infancy to toddlehood, to the great delight of his parents and the wonder of neighbouring housewives, through the stages of turning over on his stomach, lifting his head and crowing with delight, crawling, standing up, taking the first step, till he learnt to walk and run with firm steps, and even beat a tattoo with his tinkling anklet-girt feet when he went into a tantrum.

And into such a tantrum he went one fine morning in his third year when his father was leaving the house for his bath in the temple tank. Cajolements and threats were of no avail.

Looking at the child that followed him,
 the man of great austerities
 paused on his way to the tank
 and, pretending to be angry,
 forbade the child to follow him;
 but on seeing him beat a tattoo of childish tantrum
 with his tinkling anklet-girt feet,
 and refuse to go back, said:
 "If this is the way you behave,
 then go with me," and took him along.

1955-57

* * *

Arrived at the tank, he left the child on the bank, and, loath to part from the child, entered the water with hesitation, after saying a prayer to the magnanimous Lord seated on the boat along with His Dame. After finishing his bath and associated rituals in a hurry before the child could miss him, he was seized by a great longing, and dived once again in the water and did not come up for a long time.

On the Vaidic Sage diving into the water,
 the child standing on the bank
 of the full-to-the-brim tank,
 his state of mind of not being able to bear
 the absence of the father for even a second
 serving as an excuse,
 began to weep
 on account of recollection

of his worshipping in the past
the anklet-girt feet of the Lord
according to the ritualistic liturgy
surging up in his mind.

1959-61

* * *

With the lotuses—the eyes—
brimming with tears,
with the buds—the fists—kneading the eyes,
with the small lips of the mouth,
which resembled the red fruit
of the *kovrai* creeper of colourful flowers,
trembling,
the child resembling a sacred calf,
with sobs shaking his tiny frame,
wept with a noise resounding

like the chant of the countless *slokas* of the Vedas
while all created beings exulted with joy.

1960-62

* * *

With tear drops shimmering like dew on his body,
he looked elsewhere than the tank and wept.
Was it because he recollects Lord Civan,
his Refuge up above?
Was it merely the behaviour of a child?
Looking at the boat-shaped holy spire of the temple
of the Lord of body of rosy hue
with white ashes thereon,
he called 'O Mummy! O Daddy!' and wailed.

1961-63

* * *

At that moment,
the Lord seated on the sacred boat,
desirous of bestowing his Grace on him
with His benign look
in consideration of the remarkable devoted service
rendered by the child in his past state,
mounted His bellicose bull
along with the willowy Dame of the hills and arrived
resplendent with the baby moon on His head,
at the luscious tank.

* * *

Perhaps, remembering the boon
He had granted to the Vaidic brahmin,
skilled in the sacred Vedas, and to his wife,
the Lord graciously deigned to bid Her by His side—

who had mastery over the *Vedas*—
to bestow on the child the gnosis
which comes through treading the unique path
of cherising His glorious feet.

* * *

With gracious compassion rising in His heart
at the sight of the wailing child,
the Lord benignantly looked at
the willowy Dame of the hills
whom all the world worships,
and said: “Give him in a gold cup
a feed of the milk
which gushes forth from your twin breasts”.

* * *

On Lord Civan thus graciously bidding Her,
the awe-inspiring lovely Dame—
the embodiment of prosperity-promoting mercy,
the First Cause of Everything,
the One who gave birth to the *Vedas*
and the seven worlds—
went near the child
and drew into a Cup
the milk of Her breasts contained in tight bra.

1965-67

* * *

Mother *Uma* blended into the milk
the sweet ambrosia
of inconceivable gnosis of Civan,
and, saying: “Here, take this feed,”
put the gold bowl into the child’s hand,
wiping at the same time
the tear-stained eyes looking at her.
Thus the Lord with beautiful eyes
pacified the weeping child
and bestowed grace on him.

1966-68

* * *

Because the Lord,
who is said to be father and mother to everyone
thus bestowed gnosis on the child,
the child became “*aaludaiya pillaiyaar*”—
the child over whom the Lord had established His
overlordship—
and also became “*Civa-gnana-sambandhar*”—
“one who has gained contact with gnosis of Civan”—

which is a rare thing for all the Devas
and the sages to comprehend.

1967-69

* * *

A gnosis of Civan
which abounds with the treasure
of contemplation of the feet of Civan
ever and always,
a gnosis supreme in the art
of transforming the curse of birth
into a meritorious happening,
a peerless art of gnosis,
a rare-to-experience gnosis of Reality—
at that moment did Sambandhar,
the foremost in *thavam*,
gain such a gnosis.

1959 to 1968-61 to 70.

* * *

Civa-pada-hirudayar, when he had finished his bath, came up the steps of the tank, and, noticing the child glowing with his experience, asked angrily:

"By whom was given the milk which you have taken?"



And when, shouting:
 "Show me the person who had fed you
 the milk which is now drooling from your mouth,"
 he took a small switch in his hand
 and raised it to beat him,
 that small great person
 lifted one leg in a dance pose
 and, with tears of bliss beading his eyelids,
 he pointed one finger of his sacred hand
 up above.

* * *

And, showing Him,
 who, out of compassion
 filling all His thoughts,
 stood out along with His Dame
 in light filling the heavens
 seated on a sleek bull
 while the musical Vedas stood round
 humbly worshipping Him,
 the child sang words of high and holy gnosis
 which filled his heart
 and was now gushing out therefrom.

* * *

In *mallal nedunthamil*
 (in versatile Tamil)
 he sang the written-down Veda
 in a verse
 commencing with the first letter
 of the boundless Vedas,
 in combination with a consonant¹³
 to the edification and redemption
 of the people of this great earth,
 and to the delight of all created beings,
 giving a special place therein
 to the holy ear of the Lord
 in order to gain a device
 for his song to reach the transcendent Being.

1971 to 1975-73 to 75

* * *

Behold Him
 with an ear having a plug of rolled palmyra leaf stuck in

13. First letter of the Vedas is— 'O'; the consonant is — 'th'; 'th' 'O'* 'Tho'. The commencing phrase of the song is "Thodu-udiya-seviyan,"—"He with an ear which has a rolled slice of palm-leaf as an ear-ornament."

its pierced lobe,
 the Rider on the bull,
 the Wearer of a pure white moon on his locks,
 the One smeared
 with the hot ashes of the cremation ground all over His
 body,
 the Stealer of my heart.
 Him who is verily the Great Lord,
 Him, who, with His abode in Brahmapuram of proud
 fame,
 bestowed grace on Brahma
 seated on a multi-petalled lotus
 when he humbly adored Him
 on a day long ago.¹⁴

Vol. I.d.1.st.1.

*

*

*

Such was the song which a little child of three, the Son of God, sang, standing on the bank of the tank, with one finger pointing up above, and with one foot lifted up, perhaps in memory of, perhaps in imitation of, the oft-seen sight of Lord Civan performing His unceasing Cosmic dance, the eternal dance of an electron, the dance that keeps the sun and stars, the earth and the planets revolving, the dance that keeps the hearts of creatures pumping blood everlastingly, the dance that keeps the sap running up trees and plants, the dance that causes Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, the Cosmic Dance whose vibration is the Cosmic Sound 'Om'. Thus with one foot raised symbolically, the child sang to an audience of one, his amazed and unbelieving father, the father who by begetting such a son, was blessed with a vision of Lord Civan in all His glory, in the age-old form of *Ammai-Appan*, the Mother-Father of all beings.

Thus, with a beatific vision of Lord Civan and Umaiyaal, the Child Saint began his ministry at the age of three. And, since

14. The Child sang;

Thodudaiya seviyan; vidai eri;
 thoo-ven-mathi-soodi;
 Kaadudaiya-sudalai-p-podi-poosi;
 en ullam kavar kalvan;
 Edudaiya-malaraan munai-naal
 panintheththa arul seitha
 Peedudaiya Brahmapuram meviya
 pemmaan ivan andre!

he gained access to the divine gnosis which was blended with the milk drawn from the breast of the Holy Mother, Unnaamulaiyaal (her with breasts which had never been sucked by any mortal or divine child)—the Holy Mother who is, nevertheless, an eternal virgin--he got the name of Thirugnana-sambandhar; ‘Sambandhar’—‘One who had access to or contact with’, ‘*thiru*’—‘holy’, ‘*gnaanam*’—gnosis. Though Sekkizhaar uses for poetic needs only half the name, namely, ‘Sambandhar’, it will be absurd for us to use that part of the name only, or, for that matter, ‘Thirugnanam’, which truncated name most people use though they have been named ‘Gnana-sambandhan’ or ‘Thirugnana-sambandhan’. Long as the name is, we must use the full name every time. But, for the purposes of this book, we will follow Sekkizhaar’s example.

At the age of three, at an age when most children are not able to walk with confidence and firm steps, when quite a percentage of children cannot speak a well formed sentence, when most or all children of that age have a vocabulary of probably no more than fifty words, at that age of three our Child Saint sang a song of no less than eleven stanzas, a song conforming to the rigid rules of Tamil Grammar and prosody, and, what is more notable, set to an ancient classical Tamil tune. How did he do this? There is no doubt that he did this by the Grace of the gnosis blended with the milk drawn from the breast of no less a person than the Mother of all the Arts.

It would be well for us to ponder over all the stanzas of the maiden song of The Child Saint. He addressed, as we saw, the left ear of Lord Civan, the ear which is really that of the Holy Mother who has appropriated the left half of the body of Lord Civan in the complex form of *Ammai-Appan*, Mother-Father. The opening phrase of the song, ‘*Thodudaiya seviyan*’—He with a roll of palmyra leaf in the lobe of His ear—is, in fact, an answer to Civa-padha-hirudhayar’s angry query: “Who gave you the milk”. With this opening phrase, the Child sang thus:

Behold Him
with an ear having a plug of rolled palm-leaf stuck in its
pierced lobe,
the Rider on the bull,
the Wearer of a pure white moon on His locks,
the One smeared

with the hot ashes of the cremation ground all over His body,
 the Stealer of my heart,
 Him who is verily the Great Lord,
 Him, who, with His abode in Brahmapuram of proud
 fame,
 bestowed grace on Brahma
 seated on a multi-petalled lotus
 when he humbly adored Him
 on a day long ago.

* * *

Adorned with the aged shell of a tortoise,
 a baby serpent, and the tusk of a boar
 is the Stealer of my heart
 who comes begging for alms
 with a shrivelled skull as a bowl:
 He here is indeed no other than the Great Lord
 mounted on a bull,
 who abides in Brahmapuram
 where great men of knowledge
 gained by learning and listening
 worship His feet with their hands
 and sing His praises.

* * *

Weaver of a waxing bright moon
 on His lofty russet matted locks
 with an expanse of water locked therein
 is the Stealer of my heart,
 who makes my broad twin bangles
 hang loose on my wrists,
 grown thin with pining for His love:
 He here is indeed no other than the Great Lord
 who abides in Brahmapuram of far-flung fame
 as the unique foremost city
 in this world teeming with numerous cities.

* * *

He who not only rejoiced in training His bow
 on the fortresses in the sky
 but also delighted in eating the food
 which He had begged as alms,
 He is the Stealer of my heart:
 He here is indeed the Great Lord of Brahmapuram
 on whose rock-like broad chest
 profusely decked with the serpent
 which delights to dwell in the earth,

and with the *kondrai* flowers
the Dame rejoices to dwell.

* * *

He whom I can describe
as One with a Dame on one side of His body,
as One with matted locks,
as a Rider on a bull,
He of the seductive speech,
He is the Stealer of my heart:
He here is indeed the Great Lord
who abides in Brahmapuram famed as the City
which floated on the surface
at the time when the angry sea
engulfed all the world.

* * *

He who makes the twin bangles on my wrists
slip down with pining of my body for love of Him,
the Dancer to the tune of a song
imbued with the theme of the Vedas,
the One armed with a mace,
He is the Stealer of my heart:
He here is indeed the Great Lord
who abides in Brahmapuram
girt with dark bowers
redolent with fragrance,
and very tall groves
through which stream the beams of the moon
shining over the city.

* * *

He with water-logged locks,
He who swings a fire on His hand
and dances thunderously
scattering fiery sparks all around,
He with a snake hugging His garments,
He who came down from above,
He is the Stealer of my heart:
He here is indeed the Great Lord
who abides in Brahmapuram
girt by an inlet of the sea
on the sands of which nest the female swans
with feathers of golden sheen.

* * *

He who drained the strength
of the perspiring shoulders

of the King of the Great Lanka
 who tried to uproot the Kailasa Hill,
 He is the Stealer of my heart:
 He here is indeed the Great Lord
 who abides in Brahmapuram
 whose name is eternally alive
 through successive cataclysms
 occurring in the misery-laden world.

* * *

He who stretched Himself erect and grew so tall
 that Vishnu and he seated on the cool lotus,
 who contended to see who is the greater among them,
 had to abandon their attempt
 to see His feet and head,
 He is the Stealer of my heart:
 He here is indeed the Great Lord
 who abides in Brahmapura
 where women with shining foreheads
 and others of the earth
 praise and adore Him.

* * *

He who goes about in the world begging His food
 while the Buddhists and the senseless Jains
 vie with each other in talking behind His back
 slander about Him, transcending the bounds of decency,
 He is the Stealer of my heart,
 He is indeed the Great Lord
 who abides in Brahmapuram
 of whom people say:
 "What is this mystery of being wrapped in a hide,
 putting to death a rutting elephant to get it?
 Perhaps, He is a madman!"

* * *

This great Lord abiding in Brahmapuram
 with the lotus-abounding vast tank,
 whose water conferred Mukti
 on Brahma the Sage of the Vedas of rare *dharma*—
 easy is the extirpation of the *sancita karma*¹⁵
 of those able to experience

15. Sancita Karma—balance at the credit of a soul and yet to develop into Prarabdha Karma—Karma which has sufficiently matured to yield fruits .

with one-pointed mind
 this Great Lord
 spoken of by Gnana-sambandhan in Tamil.
 the Depository of the Love
 of the Holy Pathway to God.

Vol. I.d.I. st. 1. to 11.

Such is the song, which a child of three under threat of punishment by his father, sang on the spur of the moment, affirming in eleven stanzas which leave no room for any doubt that the Lord he was seeing up above, that the Lord who gave him the milk, was no other than the ancient Lord Civan abiding in the ancient temple in Brahmapuram.

This maiden song is important not only because it was sung by a child at the age of three. Its importance lies also in the themes of three stanzas, the eighth, the tenth, and the eleventh.

The theme of the eighth stanza is the humbling of Ravana, the proud king of Lanka. His devotion, his love of Civan, was unparalleled. But when he presumed to uproot Mount Kailasa with Lord Civan seated thereon with His Spouse, that he may have Lord Civan all to himself in the strong hold of the capital of his domain, then his love became possessive. He had to be taught that love possesses not, nor would it be possessed. Therefore Lord Civan pressed down Mount Kailasa with His big toe and crushed the twenty arms of Ravana till he cried in agony for pardon.

Sekkizhaar takes the trouble to interpret the eighth stanza for us; for it has a universal message for all mankind. He sings:

In order to show that
 even if the dwellers on the earth
 commit an offence,
 the great mercy of the Lord
 with an eye on the forehead
 will put a protecting arm round them,
 He graciously interposed the stanza
 on the act of constructive mercy
 whereby the Lord bestowed grace
 on the thoughtless mighty Rakshasa
 who sang the musical *Samia Veda*
 when his arms were crushed
 during his attempt to uproot the Kailasa Mountain.

1975-77

Lord Civan is the stern father who inflicts punishment out of corrective love. He is at the same time the most loving mother who hugs the child to her bosom when it sheds tears of repentance. He is the Father and the Mother. He corrects and coddles His devotees, both out of unbounded love. Such is the greatness of the theme of the eighth stanza of the decades of Thirugnana-sambandhar.

The theme of the tenth stanza is the immediate reason for Thirugnana-sambandhar, the *Isvarakoti*, being born on earth as a human being—the re-establishment of Caivaism and Vedism in their ancient pristine glory.

The theme of the eleventh stanza is the greatest of the three themes, the promise of eradication of the misery of all human beings by the power of the song sung in praise of God by Thirugnana-sambandhar, the Son of God, who was fed the milk from the breast of the Holy Mother to which had been added *Civagnaanam*—the gnosis of Lord Civan.

These three themes found in the eighth, the tenth and the eleventh stanzas would be outstanding even if they were but found in one decad, but when the same themes pervade respective stanzas in all the decades sung by Thirugnana-sambandhar, then they gain a unique significance, and sum up the life mission of Thirugnana-sambandhar—

Ridding human love of all its dross and
transforming it into a love that is more than human;
restoration of Caivaism and Vedism to their ancient glory,
and
eradication of the misery of mankind.

Before we leave these themes, we would do well to revert to the theme of the eleventh stanza of the decades sung by Thirugnana-sambandhar. That theme is unique in the history of the saints of Tamilnadu, the chief of whom were Thirugnana-sambandhar, Thirunavukkarasar, lovingly named ‘Appar’ by Thirugnana-sambandhar, Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, and Maanikkavaachakar. These four are famed as the *Naalvar*—The Four. Other than Thirugnana-sambandhar and Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, the other two had not presumed to offer mankind either on their own behalf or on behalf of Lord Civan eradication of misery or absolution of their sins. If this is the case with these two, we need not say that

none of the rest of the saints of Tamilnadu had ever presumed to make such an offer. They could not do so even if they had wished to do so, for they were not *Isvarakotis*. It was because that Thirugnana-sambandhar was an *Isvarakoti*, an *avatar*, not necessarily of Lord Civan, but with many of the aspects of the Lord, that he had the authority to confer benediction on humanity and to offer release from the miseries and vicissitudes that beset mankind. It is by the same authority that Thirugnana-sambandhar sings his decades with his name, a feature never found in any of the hundreds of decades of the other saints. In the case of Sundaramoorthi Swamikal he was the Companion of God and exercised privileges not available to the other two.

That the day was momentous for Caivaism is obvious. But how was it momentous for Tamil? Parallel to the decline of Caivaism there was a decline of Tamil and its Literature. The advent of Jainism and its rapid rise to power may well have been the cause. Without belittling the contributions of Jains to Tamil Literature, one may dare say that, by and large, Tamil and its Literature suffered by the rise of Jainism to power in Tamilnadu. Tamil and Tamil-Literature had touched, we may say, an all-time low when Thirugnana-sambandhar was born. For when Caivaism declined, Tamil also declined. The two are inseparable components of one unit, and are interchangeable terms. Thirugnana-sambandhar was only too poignantly aware of this, so much aware that in the last stanza of every decad he drew attention to the fact that he was singing his song of adoration of Lord Civan in Tamil, the word being qualified by one or several adjectives in praise of it. Thus, in the last line of the eleventh stanza of the very first decad sung by Thirugnana-sambandhar at the tender age of three, Tamil is '*Thiru-neriya*' Tamil, meaning Tamil, the Depository of the Love of the Pathway to God. In fact, the phrase stands not so much for the Tamil Language as for the Tamil verses themselves sung by the Child Saint. He calls them 'Tamil'. This is the term by which the verses are called in many decades. The word 'Tamil' is a synonym of Thirugnana-sambandhar's songs in adoration of Lord Civan. Not content with calling his verses Tamil, he takes pride in announcing that he is a Tamilari. Thus, for instance, in a decad sung at Thiruvaazhkoliipuththur, a decad which begins with the words, '*saekai aayirum udaiyaar, saamamum othuvathu udaiyaar*'—the Lord

who has thousands of *Vedic* hymns sung about Him; He who Himself sings the *Saama Veda*. Sambandhar calls himself in the eleventh stanza '*narrtamizh Gnana-sambandhan*', Gnana-sambandhan the goodly Tamilan, or Gnana-sambandhan of the goodly Tamil, or skilled in the goodly Tamil. It would, therefore, be no exaggeration to say that Thirugnana-sambandhar was born as much for the renaissance of the Tamil Language and its Literature as for the regeneration of Caivaism.

Sekkizhaar, stating the purposes for which Thirugnana-sambandhar was born, sings:

On the exceedingly auspicious day
of the *Aathirai* asterism,
the venerable Son of God
incarnated himself in Senbai
that the object of the *thavam* performed
by versatile Tamil might be fulfilled,
that the unassailable fertile Tamil culture
may prevail over alien cultures.”

* * *

These purposes were not the wishful thinking of a Tamil chauvinist, a Tamil fanatic. Sekkizhaar did no more than infer these purposes from the phrases of Thirugnana-sambandhar ringing with pride in being a Tamilan and in singing in Tamil. It would be no exaggeration to say that when Civapadahirudayar performed *thavam* for a son, Tamil also sat by him in an invisible cloak performing *thavam* for a redeemer. And Lord Civan answered the prayer of both with one boon in the form of Thirugnana-sambandhar. Rama-linga-Swamikal sang:

My life and compassion are one, not two!
If compassion departs from my heart
my life too departs.”

It was not by chance that compassion and he were one.

He sings:

You are the merciful One
Who agreeing to let me and compassion be together,
brought me down to stay and lead my life
in this world.

If we substitute the word ‘Tamil’ in the place of ‘compassion’ the above words could well have been sung by Thirugnana-sam-

bandhar. Such was the relationship of Tamil and Thirugnana-sambandhar, a relationship not come by through chance but by the divine will of God. Such was Thirugnana-sambandhar's love of Tamil, and such was his skill in the language that all his songs are couched in the purest Tamil words.

It must be remembered that it was a child of three who exhibited these qualities of learning and love of God and Tamil. Such a child is called today a hyperlexic. Who is a hyperlexic? Hyperlexics are persons who instantly assimilate whatever they read. They are children of three or a year or two more. Thirugnana-sambandhar never learnt the alphabet, much less did he learn to read. But even while in the womb of his mother he was endowed with all learning, spiritual and worldly. He knew the Tamil grammar, Tamil prosody, Tamil music, he knew Sanskrit, he knew the Vedas, the *Aagamaas*, the Upanishads. He was a *karuvile thiru udaiyaar*, a person who had received the grace of God even in his embryonic state. Epictetus says: "Surely God chooses His servants at birth or, perhaps, even before birth." And Thirugnana-sambandhar was chosen even before birth. Unlike other mortals, he was not subject to the dominance of *tirodhanam*, the influence of Lethe, the Cloud of Forgetting. Being an *Iavarakoti* he could remember all that he had learnt in all his past lives on earth. He was not subject to the five powers of Lord Civan, His *panchakritya*—creation, sustenance, secreting within Himself, *tirodhanam*, and deliverance. He had gone through the mill before and was now eternally free of bondage.

Thirugnana-sambandhar is the earliest known hyperlexic in Tamilnadu, perhaps, in the whole of India, and, possibly, in the world. Another hyperlexic of Tamilnadu was *Meikandaar*, the Codifier of *Caiva-siddhantha*, but he was five years old when his gift was displayed; a third hyperlexic of Tamilnadu was Ramalinga Swaamikal of the 19th century, but he was eight years before his gift was revealed. And, according to his own statement, he was taught by God Himself. Thirugnana-sambandhar was not taught by man or God.

Thirugnana-sambandhar had to be a hyperlexic, since he was to live only sixteen years in which he had to arouse in the people

of Tamilnadu a pride in their own villages and towns, their rivers and ponds, their temples and their religion, their language and its literature, and, above all, in their God. In that all but too short a time he had, moreover, to rout alien religions and cultures, particularly Jainism, which had to be thrown down from the tyrannical pedestal it had climbed to with the help of royal patronage. In thirteen years, he had to travel the length and breadth of both the banks of the River Cauvery, nay, the length and breadth of Tamilnadu in its heyday when it covered all the territory from Venkatagiri—modern Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh—in the north to Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin) in the southern tip of India, and from the east coast right up to a great part of present Kerala in the west. In all he made six tours, each a wider circle than the previous one, returning each time to his birth-place, Kaazhi, right in the heart of Tamilnadu. He has left us a legacy of 383 decads comprising 4230 stanzas of devotional songs which he sang at the 219 shrines he visited to pay homage to Lord Civan. It is said that there were originally more than 10,000 stanzas, inscribed lovingly by his devotees on palm leaves. Most of which had fallen prey to white ants while they were in storage in the temple at Thillai, modern Chidambaram. In the circumstances, the number of shrines he visited might have exceeded five hundred. It is true that he travelled to all but 19 shrines in a palanquin (a litter); nevertheless, thirteen years is all but too short a time for these tours.

Therefore, Thirugnana-sambandhar had to be, of necessity, a hyperlexic. And this quality was best displayed in his seventh year when he confounded the pundits who had come to officiate at his *upanayanam*, the ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread, a function that makes a de-jure Brahmana of a boy who was till then only a de-facto Brahmana by reason of his birth to Brahmana parents. By three years he had complete knowledge of the Tamil language—its literature, grammar and prosody—and the musical tunes called *pun* in Tamil and *raga* in Sanskrit and North Indian languages. By the same age, he had no rival in the knowledge of the Vedas and the *Aagamas*.

It should be emphasised that Thirugnana-sambandhar was not by any means a precocious child, but justly considered a pest by all lovers of children. He never lost the unique quality of children, the

gift of wonder. At the age of three he craned his neck to look at the vision of Lord Civan and His Spouse Uma, astride a bull. Filled with ecstasy mingled with awe and wonder, he described to his father, detail by detail the vision he saw. Since then to the end of his days, he never ceased to physically and metaphorically crane his neck to look with awe and wonder, with joy and ecstasy, at the tops of trees and houses, at clouds and the sun and the moon, at temple spires and tops of flagstaffs. To him the trees kissed the clouds, and the spires of temples pierced the vaults of heaven. Everything was lofty and tall, everything was exciting and wonderful. This is the quality of his poetry, though some may complain of much of a muchness in them. It is not the fault of Thirugnana-sambandhar. It is we, men of the 20th century, who have lost the great gift of wonder, the wonder that is the rock on which faith in God is built. It is we, who have had a surfeit of scientific marvels and have become blasé, who are to blame.

Lord Jesus Christ said: "I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." To change and become like children is necessary not only for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, but for even a much lesser privilege such as appreciating the poetry of Thirugnana-sambandhar. Edwin Way Teale, author of "Adventures in Nature", relates an experience he had when, as a child of six years, he accompanied his grandfather to bring firewood for the farm-house. He writes:

"After nearly half an hour had gone by, my grandfather's long sled was full and he called me back to the seat. As we rode away I looked back as long as I could see the trees, watching to the last this gloomy wood, under its gloomy sky which had made such a profound impression on me. All the way home I was silent, busy with my own speculations.

"Thirty years later, I spent one whole summer's day driving my car over dirt roads of the region, searching for the old remembered woods. But I never found it. Perhaps I took the wrong turn. Perhaps the woods had been felled and the land turned into cultivated fields. Perhaps I failed to recognise the wooded tract as seen through the eyes of a small boy. I know that, as I drove about, the great distances of childhood had greatly shrunk. How soon I

came to the corners! How much smaller were the trees than I remembered them! How much low the hills! Time seemed to have dwarfed the towering barns of boyhood, and to have reduced the size of cornfields and pastures. At any rate I never saw the ancient trees of that old woodland a second time. The lost woods of childhood remained lost for ever."

Sir George Trevelyan writing in The Mountain Path of April 1978 on 'Birds in Imagination and Poetry' observes:

"Then consider the song of birds. Here also there are two ways of looking. We can rightly use songs for identification of the species and be content to leave it at that. Or we can use it to awaken wonder, that source, as the Greeks knew, of all knowledge. An apocryphal saying of Jesus runs: 'Cease not from search until ye find; finding ye shall wonder; wondering ye shall enter the Kingdom and, in the Kingdom ye shall find peace.'

"The Kingdom is everywhere but on a higher frequency which normal looking does not touch. We have to lift our thinking to imaginative perception and see beyond the immediate appearance. Then at every point in nature, the Kingdom can be entered.

"Perhaps, we have here the answer to our first question, 'What are the birds for?' They are to awaken wonder, the Key to the Kingdom."

Sri George Trevelyan's article, particularly the passage quoted above, is the answer to the question. "In the poetry of Thirugnana-sambandhar what are groves, towers, turrets, clouds, fields, rivers, and streams for?" They are to awaken wonder, the Key to the Kingdom.

When Lord Civan told Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, "The best form of worshipping Us is songs," he could well have rounded off the dictum by adding, "The essence of worship is wonder!"

No wonder, then, the essence of worship in Thirugnana-sambandhar's poetry is wonder.

In India, children have ceased to exist since a long time ago. There are only adults of three, five or seven years. For that matter, the condition is the same in the world at large also. In the circumstances, it is no wonder that old men in their second childhood should cavil at the style of Thirugnana-sambandhar's poems and

complain that they are concerned with the trivia of clouds and groves, spires and stars. We have heard people talk of bird's eye view and worm's eye view, but no one has thought of a child's eye view. The child's eyes are always lifted up to the mother's face, to the tall father's face, to the moon in the sky, and, in the case of some gifted children, like Thirugnana-sambandhar, to the ear of Lord Civan adorned with a rolled palm leaf plug in the lobe of the ear.

Thirugnana-sambandhar did not waste even a single day before he set out on the first part of his mission on earth. Riding on the shoulders of his father, he visited neighbouring Kolakkaa and sang the second of his 383 decades. Kolakkaa is no more than three quarters of a kilometre from Seekaazhi, and one can afely presume that the child set out on this pilgrimage within minutes or an hour of his return to his home from the temple tank. This visit was more in the nature of a formal inauguration of the first phase of the mission of the Child Saint than a pilgrimage proper. Nevertheless, this pilgrimage is significant in two ways. The lesser and mundane significant aspect is that this is the beginning of a *padayatra*—journey on foot. The world's first *padayatra* was performed, in so far as history can tell us, when Lord Buddha began his *padayatra*, a *padayatra* of compassion. The second greatest *padayatra* was performed again by a man of compassion, Lord Jesus Christ, who spent the last three years of his life traversing the terrain of Israel, and who did his last *padayatra* carrying his own cross, and resting at fourteen stations before he came to the end of his *padayatras* and his life. There is no mobile creature which does not walk. Birds too walk when during the few hours they tread the earth. All quadrupeds walk. What elevates this ordinary form of locomotion is the motive.

The more important significant aspect of this first pilgrimage of Thirugnana-sambandhar is the hope he holds out to the world in nine of the eleven stanzas of the decad which he sang at that shrine. It is said that a picture of what one has seen stays in the pupil of the eye for as much as one-sixteenth of a second. If this is the case with mere human eyes of flesh and blood, one need not strain his imagination in trying to conceive what would have been the effect of a vision of Lord Civan and the Divine Mother on a pair of eyes

of a child who has been blessed with eyes of gnosis in addition to his eyes of flesh and blood. With that ineffable vision still dwelling in the pupil of his eyes the child sang before the Lord enshrined in Kolakkaa. It is no wonder that this song has a unique feature not found in any of the other 300 and odd songs the child sang in its life on earth.

The first stanza expresses the amazement of the child at the form of the Lord he saw in this shrine, so totally different from the one it had seen not more than an hour before and which still lingered in the pupils of his eyes.

The child exclaims:

What is this form I see in Kolakkaa,
where the *vaalai* fish leaps
over the sluice gates of streams,
and where beautiful women
churn the waters of the tank
as they dive and swim about in its waters!
Matted locks, crescent moon,
daubs of sacred ash,
and loincloth!!!

* * *

The second stanza introduces this queerly dressed figure to us as a unique figure of compassion never equalled by any one in heaven or earth. The *Naalvars*, all four of them, are never tired of singing of this aspect of Lord Civan, Civan the Compassionate. Thirumoolar summed up this quality in two words in Tamil, but which requires four words in English to give voice to it. “*Anbe Civam*”, he said: Love indeed is Civam. Lord Civan, if He is anything, He is love incarnate. Manikkavaachakar is never tired of singing about this quality of compassion. He sings: “O Lord who ate poison, You who are entitled to eat the *amrit*—nectar!” In ‘*Thiruchchaazhal*’, the decad of a duet between a sneering cynic and a sincere devotee, the poet makes the cynic ask:

“He ate the poison
which rose up that day
to the surface of the boiling, roaring sea!
What is this hocus-pocus of his?”

To which the devotee replies:

“Note that if He had not eaten the poison that day,

all the grand Devas
including Brahma and Vishnu
would have perished!"

* * *

And now Thirugnana-sambandhar sings to inspire confidence and hope in the people of all times:

"He who has a Dame as a part of Him,
He who has a crescent moon on His head,
He who chose Kolakkaa as His abode,
on the Devas joining the palms
in obeisance to His feet,
ate He the poison that the world may be saved.

* * *

The Son of God now proceeds to promise, on behalf of the Stealer of his heart, deliverance from all the ills of the worlds.

He solemnly assures humanity that,

on singing ecstatically the glories
of Kolakkaa of the Eternal Youth,
and on cherishing the Adept in the Vedas in one's heart,
all bonds will dissolve and drop off.

* * *

He exhorts humanity thus:

O you who desire the reduction
of the burden of sins
you have garnered,
do live praising unfailingly Kolakkaa
of the Lord of the army of ghouls.

* * *

He promises humanity that
on meditating on
Kuyils-abounding-groves-girt Kolakkaa
of our Father who burnt
and toppled down the fortresses three,
your sins will destroyed be.

* * *

He invites humanity to worship the feet of Lord Civan.

O you who desire the destruction
of your eternally sprouting Karma,

* * *

and promises that

the Karmas of those who would regularly worship
Kolakkaa of the Lord
who crushed the strong arms of the King of Lanka
will desert them.

* * *

He exhorts humanity thus:

Do worship the feet of Him
who kicked at the god of death,
and who has made Kolakkaa His abode,
and live joyously.

* * *

He promises that

If people who do not receive into their fold
the.....Jains and the.....Buddhists
of erroneous doctrines
would praise Kolakkaa in song,
their sins would vanish.

* * *

Finally, he promises humanity that

Sincere men skilled in these powerful songs
sung by Gnana-sambandhan of prosperous Kaazhi
in praise of the Lord
abiding in Kolakkaa inhabited by righteous families
will lead a lofty life,
rid of their mountainous Karma.

* * *

Thus began the thirteen years ministry of Thirugnana-sambandhar. This decad set the tone for all the three hundred and odd decades sung by the Child Saint in his short but crowded life.

Just as Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal was the Companion of God and Thirunavukkarasar was the Servant of God, Thirugnana-sambandhar was the Son of God. Among the attitudes of approach

to God, the attitude of Son of God, or, Sat-putra-maargam as it is called, is an important one. And Thirugnana-sambandhar's role was that of the Son of God. God conferred the role on him the very moment he bade Parvali feed the child crying on the banks of the tank with milk drawn from her breast. At the very moment God bade Uma feed the child with Her milk, Lord Civan accepted His role of fond parent. The solicitude which characterised Lord Civan's command to Uma to feed the child continued during all through the life of Thirugnana-sambandhar. For instance, it manifested itself again within a matter of an hour or two of the child's feed of divine milk. Sekkizhaar recounts this incident graphically. He sings:

When the Prince of the Kowniyar clan
 was singing the decad,
 a unique creation in the art of music,
 in praise of the glorious Content
 of the truth-laden perfect creation—the Vedas,
 in praise of Him who bears on His crown
 the snake with its bag of poison, and the baby moon
 and bestows grace on them,
 in praise of Him with the markedly dark throat,
 and was keeping time with his hands,

* * *

The Heavenly Being with the russet matted locks,
 on seeing the child keeping time
 by clapping with his hands,
 was moved to pity
 and, by His grace,
 a golden pair of cymbals
 inscribed with the Mystic Five Letters of the Lord
 descended on the palms of the Brahmana youngster
 who had come to redeem the entire universe,
 that he might keep time with them
 to the song he was singing. 2000, 2001-102, 103

* * *

This loving parental solicitude was to be manifested very remarkably quite soon after the gift of the cymbals. In fact, this solicitude continued to the end of the life of the saint.

Thirugnana-sambandhar's early pilgrimages resembled very closely the faltering and tottering steps which a child just learning

to walk would take. They were experimental and hesitant. We may call his visit to Kolakkaa his first round of pilgrimage. With the visit to this single shrine, the child returned to the lap of its mother. Sekkizhaar goes to the trouble of mentioning that

as the child was walking back
bearing in his blossomy hands
the sacred cymbals,
his father unable to bear the sight
of his child walking on foot,
bore him on his shoulders,
and the child thus borne aloft
returned triumphantly to his home in Seekaazhi.

2004-106.

* * *

Not much later after his return from Kolakkaa, the people of Nannipalli, the birthplace of his mother, came and entreated him to visit their village. He set out to walk to the place. but his father, unable to bear either the sight of the child walking to the village, or the thought of anyone else bearing him on their shoulders, lifted the child on to his own shoulders and bore him along. This visit to Nannipalli was the second round of pilgrimages by the child saint. Comfortably ensconced on the shoulders of his father, the child made a tour of Nannipalli, Thalasai (now called Thalaichchangkaadu), Thiruvalam, Pallvaneechchuram, Thiruchchaikaadu, Venkaadu and Thirumullaivaayil, and returned to Seekaazhi. The child of three did a pilgrimage of seven shrines, although it was on the shoulders of his proud father. In distance and area covered the pilgrimage took him over a hundred and sixty kilometres and two hundred and six square kilometres. When we recollect that all the shrines lie to the east of Seekaazhi and on the sandy seacoast, we can in a measure assess the arduousness of the journey. In terms of days, the pilgrimage could well have lasted a minimum of six to eight weeks. And a child of three, a child whom Sekkizaar calls 'Paalarraavaayar', a child whose mouth has not ceased suckling milk, untiringly journeyed from place to place, in the dewy morning and the hot sun, in the starry night and the biting east wind, sustained by no more than and no less than a love "more than human to a God who was more intimate to him than his own self." It is worth pausing here

and pondering on this thought; for this journey set the tone for the pilgrimages to come to hundreds of shrines hundreds of miles apart. And all this time and for ever afterwards, the 'Paalaarraavaayar,' this child whose mouth has not ceased suckling milk, was away from its mother, the earthly mother. 'Paalaarraavaayaayar', Sekkizhaar called the child. But we may well call him 'Paalattravaayaayar', a child who has been weaned from milk. For, after the drink of milk, a draught from the bosom of the Divine Mother, the child could not thereafter drink milk from the breast of anyone, be she his own mother. Therefore, when Sekkizhaar called the child 'Paalarraavaayaayar', he did not mean a child which had not yet been weaned from breast milk, but a child who for all the rest of his life never ceased to feel the taste of the milk from the breast of the Divine Mother; for if at any time he ceased to feel the taste of the milk of gnosis, the gnosis would desert him. And so too it would have done if human milk had moistened his lips after the draught of the divine milk with which was blended gnosis of Lord Civan.

There is one feature in these pilgrimages of Thirugnana-sambandhar which is unique to them. After each tour of pilgrimage, he returned to Seekaazhi. Thirunavukkarasar came back only once to Thiruathikaiveerattaanam. Sundaramoorthi Swamikal never came back to Naavaloor or Thiruvennainalloor. As for Manikkavachakar, he shuttled between Thirupperunthurai and Thillai, and sang the largest number of decades, as many as 29 out of 51, at Thillai. It is remarkable that Manikkavachakar never sang a single song at Madurai which should have been seared into his memory after the number of crucial incidents which took place there. Strangest of all is that he never visited Thiruvaathavoor, his birthplace, though he bore the name of that place in his name just as Sundaramoorthi Swamikal carried the name of Naavaloor in his name.

Soon after the second round of pilgrimages, Thirugnana-sambandhar set out from Seekaazhi on his third tour, which was a very short one, a pilgrimage to no more than two places—Mayendrapalli and Kurukaavoor—and a revisit to Thirumullai-vaayil and surrounding shrines. He had to return to Seekaazhi on hearing that Thiruneelakanta-perumpaaanar, a virtuoso in playing the yaazh, a stringed instrument like the lyre, was arriving there to call on him.

Thirugnana-sambandhar was enchanted with the skill of Thiruneelakanta-perumpaanar in playing on the Yaazh, and readily acceded to his request that he might be permitted to accompany him on the Yaazh when he sang in the various shrines. Accompanied by Thiruneelakanta-perumpaanar, the Child Saint set out on his fourth round of pilgrimages. And for the rest of the life of Thirugnana-sambandhar, or, for that matter, for the rest of his own life, Thiruneelakanta-perumpaanar did not part from the Child Saint. He accompanied him to all the two hundred and odd pilgrimage centres and finally accompanied him to heaven.

Like a fledgling cautiously trying its wings, the Child Saint timorously trod his way round the shrines of Lord Civan. His first tour of pilgrimage was, as we saw, a visit to just one shrine not more than three-quarters of a kilometres from Seekaazhi. The second tour covered just seven shrines, and the third no more than two when it was interrupted by the news of the arrival at Seekaazhi of Thiruneelakanta-perumpaanar. The child saint broke his pilgrimage and returned to Seekaazhi.

But soon after, accompanied by Thiruneelakanta-perumpaanar, he set out on his fourth tour of pilgrimage centres. In this tour he covered twentyone centres. Beginning from Kolakkai the first pilgrimage centre of the first round, he had been carried by his father or other devotees on their shoulders, though now and then he walked a part of the way, becoming restless as any child of 3 to 5 would be on being constantly carried about. Notable as his visit to Thillai was, especially on the eve of the second occasion when he saw in a vision all the Thiliai-vaazh-anthanars —Thillai-dwelling Brahmanas—as members of the Host of Ghouls who accompany Lord Civan, yet this tour was not marked by any outstanding event except for the second major act of solicitude performed by Lord Civan at Araththurai, the tenth pilgrim centre out of a total of twentyone covered in this fourth round of pilgrimages. Let us hear Sekkizhaar relate this unparalleled act of grace of Lord Civan. He sings:

He who, on former days, used to be seated
on occasions on the shoulders of his father,
now gave up doing so,
and went in advance of his group,

impelled by a desire arising in his heart
to go near the beautiful-eyed Lord.

* * *

When Sambandhar,
eager to reach Araththurai of the Primordial Lord,
was hurrying on towards the place
to the great concern of his father,
his lotus-like feet began to ache by and by.

2084, 2085—186, 187

* * *

When Sambandhar and his retinue arrived at a place called Maaranpaadi, all of them were so worn out by the arduous journey that they halted at the place for the night.

When such was the case,
the Lord with the river-laden head
graciously thought of the miseries of the road
of the Prince of beauty-abounding Poontharaai.
To ride on, a palanquin;
to provide shade, an umbrella;
to proclaim the saint's glory and blow, trumpets
all set with matchless pearls,
these, the ash-smeared Immaculate One
graciously decided to bestow on Sambandhar.

2093-195.

* * *

In Nelvaayil, a town existing since long,
to every many-storeyed house,
unto the brahmanas in the gathering night,
in their dreams,
displaying the feet sought for
by the Vedas of their clan,
He went,

* * *

And said:

"Gnana-sambandhan, unto Us, is coming.
Glorious palanquin decked with pearls,
gem-set umbrella, mighty trumpets,
these, receive from Us
and approach the Prince of rare arts
and give him."

2092-2095—194 to 197

* * *

On the Lord bidding thus, the Brahmanas woke up and went to the temple where too the divine message had been received by the priests and others. All went up to the doors of the temple and opened them. And therein they saw the palanquin, the umbrella, and the trumpets, exactly as advised by the Lord. Forthwith, they took up the gifts of the Lord and delivered them to Thirugnana-sambandhar. He received the gifts with humility and pride, and sang a decad which began with this stanza,

“My Father, my God, nay great Sire,
the God seated on a bull”—
except to those who thus praise
and meditate on Him,
such a thing as this does not happen;
this is no doubt the grace of the Lord
of Nelvaayil-araththurai of beautiful cool groves
which is situated on the fertile bank
of Nivaa of rapid waters.
which shone along masses of fragrant flowers. II-90-1.

He went round the brilliant pearl-set-palanquin,
fell prostrate on the ground,
paid obeisance to the Effulgence
which matched the effulgence of the sacred ash,
and
since it was a gift of the Primeval Lord,
he chanted the Mystic Five Letters
and stepped into it,
that the world might be redeemed. 2114-216.

* * *

Saint Manikkavachakar sang:

“O Truth surpassing a mother in tenderness!”
and (in another context),
“O my Treasure! O Great Lord Civan!
O You, Who, very much more solicitous
than a mother,
who mindfully suckles her child.....!”

* * *

If any evidence was needed other than the unique one provided by the Lord bidding the Divine Mother to feed the child with milk drawn from Her breast that Thirugnana-sambandhar was the Son of God, it is supplied by this act of solicitous grace and the earlier one when the Lord, deeply troubled by the sight

of the child keeping time to his song by clapping his lotus-like soft hands, gave him a pair of golden cymbals.

Riding the palanquin and accompanied by his band of exultant devotees, the Child Saint turned homewards and arrived at Seekaazhi after visiting another thirteen shrines. In this fourth tour of pilgrimage, the Son of God covered twentyone shrines, making a total of thirtyone shrines, starting with the visit to Kolakkaa.

When he returned to Seekaazhi after the fourth round of pilgrimages, he was of age for Upanayanam, the ceremony of the investiture with the sacred thread. When we calculate the time occupied by these four tours to no more than thirty-one pilgrim centres, the most distant of them being no more than fifty kilometres from Seekaazhi, we are surprised to find that four years had passed and that the child was nearly seven years old. While part of the time taken can be accounted for by the fact that pilgrimage to the first eighteen centres was made mostly on the shoulders of Civa-pada-hirudayar and sometimes on foot, most of the four years can be accounted for only by presuming that between tours the child saint stayed quite a long while at Seekaazhi, and that the stay in each of the pilgrimage centres must have been quite a considerable number of days. If we accept these presumptions, we are compelled to believe that the total number of decades sung by the child saint could well have been many many times the present number. We cannot accept that the saint sang only a meagre 54 decades in the four years covered by the first four tours. Subrahmaniya Bharathi sang: "Our profession is to sing songs." And the profession of the child saint too was to sing songs in praise of the Lord. It is unbelievable that in four years, in the 1460 days covered by the first four tours, he did not sing at least one decad a day. But we have received only 54 decades. Therefore, the claim that thousands of decades of the child saint as well as of Appar and Sundarar had become prey to white ants must be the bare truth.

With the end of the fourth tour of pilgrimages ends one phase of the all too short life of the child saint. When Thirugnanasambandhar returned to Seekaazhi after finishing his fourth tour of pilgrimages, two momentous events in his life took place at Seekaazhi.

He had reached his seventh year of age, the age at which every

boy born to Brahmana parents should be invested with the sacred thread. Till the investiture of the scared thread the boy is no more than the son of Brahmana parents. It is doubtful whether such a boy could be called even a Brahmana *de jure*. In conformity with the traditional practice Sambandhar too was invested with the sacred thread. Sekkizhaar relates this event very prosaically thus:

While he stayed
 in the prosperous ancestral mansion
 and spent his days in going daily to the Lord
 abiding on the holy boat
 and in worshipping Him,
 and in composing and singing
 several appropriate decades
 to the great delight of his mind,
 he rapidly reached the age
 of investiture with the sacred thread
 in the prescribed manner.
 Forthwith,
 he, who had intuitively gained
 the Gnosis of Civan
 beyond the reach of the mundane world,
 now bore on his chest the thread
 and the snipping of deer-skin
 after the Brahmanas had performed
 the prescribed ancient rites.

2161-263

* * *

Sekkizhaar continues:

Standing before the venerable Brahmanas
 who raised him to the stage of the twice-born
 by performing the rites
 which, in the worldly practice, constitute
 the method of investiture of the scared thread,
 the virtuous one who had taken birth in Pukali,
 he who is never subject to any birth on earth
 (through working of the Law of Karma)—
 addressed those who told him,
 “We have now given you instruction
 in the traditionally handed down Vedas Four,”
 and taught them in his sweet voice
 countless Slokas in an inimitable manner. 2162-264

* * *

The Son of God, furthermore, expounded thousands of Vedic
 slokas and many many ancient texts which are branches of the

Vedas to the astounded Brahmanas who began to think of him as God himself who had incarnated before their eyes. Moreover, he graciously imparted to them several Mantras and in addition cleared their many doubts about the rites and rituals laid down by the Vedas.

Finally,

He declared to them
in a manner which will be convincing to them
that the source of all the outstanding Mantras,
is the Primeval Lord's Letters Five:
saying so, he graciously bestowed on them
the decad bearing the theme:
“The ultimate is the letters Five”.

Thus he sang:

In sleep and when not sleeping,
with melting heart meditate daily;
it was the Five Letters
which kicked the Lord of Death
and struck him with terror
when he came to take the life of Markandeyan
who, without guile in his heart,
came to pay obeisance
to the Feet (of Lord Civan).

* * *

They are the ones
which becoming the Mantras
and the Four Vedas,
stand established in the hearts
of the heavenly ones
and enslave them.
To the perfect Brahmanas
who tend and cherish
the sacrificial ruddy fire
in the twilights,
the Mantra is the Five letters indeed!

* * *

To those
who control the breath in the body,
light the lamp of gnosis of bright rays,
and, in the worthy field,
(close the other two outlets of Idai and Pingalai)
open the other passage,
(namely, Sushumna)

and
send up the breath (to the Sahasraram)
it is the Five Letters
which destroy any obstacles in their way.

* * *

Without making the discrimination
of good people or bad people,
to those who hanker after it,
they destroy the miseries of life's journey
and show the way to Mukti.

When the myrmidons of the Lord of Death
come to kill you and take your life along,
what destroys the sufferings
are the Five Letters indeed.

* * *

Five are the powerful Cupid's arrows
of fragrant flowers,
five are the elements in this world,
five are the groves,
five are the hoods of the snakes on the Lord,
five are the fingers on His beautiful hand,
five too are the Letters.

* * *

When sneezing and cough chronically continue,
even when hot hell results,
even when in the present life
fruits of Karma come crowding on us,
and in the next birth too,
the succour is the Five Letters indeed.

* * *

They destroy the hardships of life
and sever the bonds of death and birth
of those who sing their praises;
moreover, day after day they provide wealth,
it is they which dance with delight
the eternal cosmic dance.
Such are the Five Letters.

Vandamarothi,¹⁶
 the Lady with tresses hovered over by bees,
 cherished them;
 in the ancient days
 Ravana chanted them and was redeemed;
 when devotees take them up
 and worship the Lord by chanting them,
 they confer on them lordship over the spheres;
 such are the Five Letters.

* * *

Those mad people
 who babble everyday the name
 constituted by these letters
 and praise the beauty
 of the resplendent rosy feet
 which he of the colour of rain-cloud
 and he with faces four
 could never see—
 these Letters Five are what make them
 revel in bliss.

* * *

They are the well-researched dogma
 of those with minds which do not accept
 the lies of the Buddhists,
 and of the Jains who go about
 with Kazhu—a sheaf of grass—in their hand.
 They become the sword which cleaves
 the inimical acts against those
 who wear the ash of the Adept.
 Such are the Five Letters.

* * *

Those well-versed
 in this ruin-averting garland
 of twice five stanzas
 on The Five Letters
 thoughtfully sung
 by Gnana-sambandhar skilled in good Tamil,
 learned in the Four Vedas,
 Prince of Kaazhi,
 would become Devas indeed. Vol. III d. 22 sts. 1 to 11

* * *

All of us know that the Mantra which a child receives during
 the ceremony of the investiture of the sacred thread is the famous

16. Vandamarothi—the consort of Ravana, King of Lanka. The meaning of the name of Ravana's consort has been brought into the translation, though it is not in the original text.

Gayatri-mantra, and yet, here we see the Son of God extolling the virtues of the Mystic Five Letters, Na-Ma-Chi-Vaa-Ya. We should not forget that the child had been solemnly instructed in the Gayatri-mantra and had been inducted into the fold of Brahmanas not many minutes ago, and yet, we find the child instructing his erstwhile mentors in the virtues, merits, glory and pregnant content of the Panchaaksharam the Five Letters. In the second stanza we hear the Son of God tell us that the Five letters are the kernel which contains all the Mantras (including, we should presume, the Gayatri-mantra) and the Four Vedas.

It is highly significant that Thirugnana-sambandhar sang the glory of the Five Letters at the beginning of his life as a twice-born Brahmana and also at the last moment of his life of sixteen years on earth, at a moment as momentous if not more momentous than the ceremony of the investiture of the sacred thread. The second occasion was, without comparison, the most momentous moment of his life. When he sang this second decad on the Five Letters, Thirugnana-sambandhar was standing at the threshold of the Effulgence which was Lord Civan. Dressed gorgeously as a bridegroom, with his little finger twined with the little finger of his shy bride, surrounded by kith and kin of both sides, accompanied by his parents and contemporary saints, he was about to enter the blazing Effulgence which was Lord Civan. At that moment, Thirugnana-sambandhar spoke to all those around him, spoke to all eternity his last message in a song, a swan-song. He sang:

1

Love-filled, and with tears
seeping and filling to overflowing,
those who thus chant It,
It leads them to the righteous path;
of the Vedas Four,
their Real Essence It is;
the Lord's name Namachchivaaya verily is.

* * *

Those who have faith in It,
with tongue if they chant It,
the nectar of fragrant fresh flowers
It equals;
red-golden forehead pendant
It is to all the world;
Our Hope's name. Namachchivaaya verily is.

* * *

Those who with melting heart
and rising ardour
meditate on It,
and with rosary of Rudraksha beads
keep reckoning of the chantings,
that which transforms them as worthy Devas
is verily the Naked Naathan's Namaachchivaaya.

3

* * *

The myrmidons of the Lord of Death
will fear to approach even those
who do not usually chant the Five Letters
if they gain through sweet words
the company of those
who are capable of chanting them;
to those who meditate
as an established routine practice,
the object of meditation
is verily Namachchivaaya,
the name of their dear One,
He with an eye on the forehead.

4

* * *

Killers of creatures though they be,
of good qualities and good deeds many
devoid though they be,
the wise say that from all evil
they would escape
if they would but pronounce It;
that is none other than Namachchivaaya,
the good Lord's name.

5

* * *

Men laden with sin matching the Mandara Mountain,
and tight in bondage too,
would they but pronounce It,
the bonds of Karma will drop off
and wealth will wax;
such forsooth is Nandi's name—
Namachchivaaya.

6

Even if they are people
who are on their way to enter the Seven Hells,
provided they happen to be people
who habitually utter It,
the wise say It will rescue them

and make them mingle with the Rudras;
That is verily the Boon-giver's name—
Namachchivaaya.

7

* * *

On Sankaran pressing down the toe of His foot
which rested on the rock
which Lanka's King tried to prise.
the means of survival
the terror-stricken giant uttered by his mouth
was verily the goodness-imbued name,
Namachchivaaya.

8

* * *

Namachchivaaya was verily the name
chanted by the flower-seated Brahma
and he of lotus-like eyes
when they engaged themselves
in searching for the feet and the crown
of the Noble One,
and unable to find either of them
were sore wearied.

9

* * *

Porters of porridge-filled pots,
eaters out of scooped hands,
fools of fiery words,
irreconcilables they are,
the wise say of the Jain monks.
(Let them alone),
He with a throat containing poison
which He consumed verily as nectar
on the wise heaven-dwellers entreating Him,
verily He is Namachchivaaya.

10

* * *

All those who rejoicingly sing
with all their heart
this set-to-music utterance
of Gnana-sambandhar the Tamizhan
that Namachchivaaya is the name of Nandi,
are capable of severing the rope
which binds them to the cycle
of deaths and births.

Vol. III d. 49 sts. 1 to 11

* * *

At the beginning of his life as a twice-born Brahmana and at the end of his life before he merged in the Effulgence which is Civan, Thirugnana-sambandhar sang the glory of the Five Letters, the Panchaaksharam, the Ainthezhuththu. One cannot avoid asking the question how it was that immediately after the investiture with the sacred thread he did not expatiate to the assembled learned Pandits on the merits of the Gayatri Mantra in which he was instructed not many minutes ago, and which raised him from the biological status of a Brahmana (as the son of a Brahmana) to the spiritual status of a *de facto* and *de jure* Brahmana in his own right. The reason is that the Panchaaksharam, the Ainthezhuththu, the Mystic Five Letters is the core of the Yajur Veda, its very nucleus. This is explained elaborately in Chapter XVIII of this book.

It must be noted that all the other Samaya-kuravars also sang at least one decad on the Panchaksharam. Sundaramoorthy, Swamigal, the last of the Samaya-kuravars, the Fathers of the Faith, sang:

With no other succour to me,
I meditated in my mind on Your holy feet only.
On gaining those feet I was born in this world;
and I gained the state
of never again being born on this earth.
O Good Ascetic—
venerated and worshipped by the learned—
who abide at renowned Paandi-K-Kodumudi
situated at Karraiyoor,
even if I happen to forget You,
my tongue will continue to say
“Namachchivaaya.”

* * *

And Thirunavukkarasar sang:

He is the Word,
He is the Succour,
He is the Vedas,
He is the Effulgence,
He is the Heavenly One;
on worshipping His golden feet,
well-establishing them in the heart,
when my enemies did tie a stone column to me
and launched me on the sea,
what turned out to be the best succour
was verily Namachchivaaya:

* * *

And Manikkavachakar, the earliest of the Fathers of the Faith, began his Thiruvaachakam with the words: "Hallowed be Namachchivaaya!"

* * *

Ramalinga Swamikal of the nineteenth century A.D., the latest in the galaxy of saints of Tamilnadu, has also sung about the Mystic Five Letters. Decad No. 23 of the Second Thirumurai is called Namachchivaaya Sankeerthanalahari—Waves of Sacred Praise of Namachchivaaya. He sings as a crowning piece of the decad thus:

Yet several and several days though I may live,
or
this very moment I die;
to eternal heavenly state though I may enter,
or
wearied I wallow in the vast hell,
whatever further happenings may occur to me,
or
my Lord, whatever He does unto me,
Namachchivaaya,
which seeking out the hearts of good people
stands established there,
and prevails over everything.
never will I forget.

823-II. d. 23, st. 10

* * *

To the Four Samaya-kuravars and to Ramalinga Swamikal, and consequently to all the Tamil people, no more powerful mantra is there than the Five Letters, Na-Ma-Chi-Vaa-Ya. Unlike other Mantras, the Panchaaksharam is a Mantra; it is, moreover, the name of the Supreme Brahman, and, furthermore, it is the form of Brahman Himself. Caiva Siddhaantha interprets the form of Lord Nataraja, the most perfect representation, after the Lingam, of Lord Civan in concrete form, thus in terms of the Panchaakshara.

The Thiruvarutpayan declares:

"List, O Sir, to the significance of the dancing pose!
At the sought for holy foot is 'Na',
The adjoining 'Ma' is the abdomen,
The shoulder of the extended arm is 'Chi',
The famed face is 'Vaa'
And see 'Ya' in the crown of the head".

This is the interpretation of Na-Ma-Chi-Vaa-Ya, the Sthoola or gross Panchaaksharam. Proceeding to interpret the Sookshma or subtle Panchaaksharam, the Thiruvarutpayan continues:

"The grasped drum is the 'Chi',
 The flung-out sweeping hand is 'Vaa'.
 The fear-dispelling hand is 'Ya',
 If one researches into it,
 The fire on the hand of the Lord is 'Na',
 Note that below the foot
 where Muyalakan rests is 'Ma' ".

* * *

Thus the form of Lord Civan Himself is the Panchaaksharam.

* * *

It was the glory of this Mystic Five Letters, the alter-ego of the ineffable Om, which Thirugnana-sambandhar expounded to the learned Brahmanas even as young Dakshinamoorti expounded the ineffable OM through inaudible silence to the hoary seers of old. Again, it was with this same Panchaakshara that Thirugnana-sambandhar concluded his mission on earth. If one chants the mystic five letters, the sacred word 'NAMACHI-VAAYA', he has repeated the nine thousand and odd decades of the first seven Thirumurais, the collection of the decades sung by Thirugnana-sambandhar, Thirunavukkarasar and Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, and the 656 stanzas of the Thiruvaachakam too. And, of course, the Vedas also.

And Adi Sankara Bhagavad-padaal also has sung a Panchakam—a five stanza poem on the Panchaaksharam.

At this stage of the life of Thirugnana-sambandhar, another outstanding incident of inestimable importance was the visit paid by Thirunavukkarasar to Seekaazhi to call on Thirugnana-sambandhar.

Let Sekkizhaar relate:

Hearing the repute of Gnana-sambandhar
 master of perfect Tamil,

who had drunk a seed of milk of boundless wisdom,
 which the Dame
 of fingers constantly kept supple by ball-playing,
 drew from her breast
 at the command of the Transcendent Being
 who comes riding on a prancing bull
 and offered it to the Child Saint in a golden bowl,
 Navukkarasar arrived at Poontharaai,
 a Brahmana stronghold,
 in order to pay homage to him.

* * *

On hearing that the Prince
 of great skill in speech had arrived,
 the great citizen of Pukali
 surrounded by ponds fragrant with flowers
 thought that the arrival of the Prince of Speech
 was the fruit of his past good Karma,
 and went forward with his band of devotees,
 moved by a great desire to receive him.

* * *

As he went forward,
 An unintermitting love-laden heart,
 a languor in the sacred body,
 a state of mind
 in which clothing even was a superfluity,
 a hand holding the hoe, his tool of service,
 a rain of pouring tears,
 sacred ash that shone on his frame—
 in such eternal guise
 Arasu approached him.
 The witnessing sprig of a Kauniyars,
 thinking that the image
 of the ideal guise of a revered devotee
 which he had so far entertained in his mind
 had now appeared in person before him
 went forward in worshipful pose
 and approached him
 while all the heaven-dwellers praised him.
 And when Arasu too faced him
 and saluted him with joined palms,
 Sambandhar, with his pent-up ardour pouring forth,
 graciously addressed him in honeyed words.

2166 to 2168—269 to 271

* * *

Sekkizhaar, who had let himself go without restraint when he related this same incident in Thirunaavukkarsar's biography, now exercises a restraint which dwarfs the historic significance of this meeting. In the olden days it was a rule that any literary work should be offered to the criticism, often envious and venomous, of contemporary authors of established repute. One common criticism levelled at such a work used to be 'Kooriya-kooral', repeating what has been already said in the work. Perhaps fear of such criticism prevented Sekkizhaar from repeating here certain stanzas which he sang in his biography of Thirunavukkarasar. Those stanzas would be better here than there. Thus does Sekkizhaar describe the first meeting of two greatest saints, the Crusaders on behalf of the True Faith, against monks and monarch, a child hardly seven years old and a harassed, hunted human wreck of seven times seven years.

There in the hagiography of Thirunavukkarasar, Sekkizhaar sings:

When Thirugnana-sambandhar worshippingly approached him,

Arasu, the Enslaved of God,
melting with love,

went through the throng of devotees accompanying Sambandhar,

and, moved by flawless great yearning,
fell at his feet.

Taking hold of the hands of him who prostrated,
he, who, by his weeping, called out to Him

who comes riding on a bull,
lifted Appar up with his blossomy hands

and, paying obeisance to him,
hailed him, "APPARE"! "O Father" !

and the other in return replied,
"Your humble servant!"

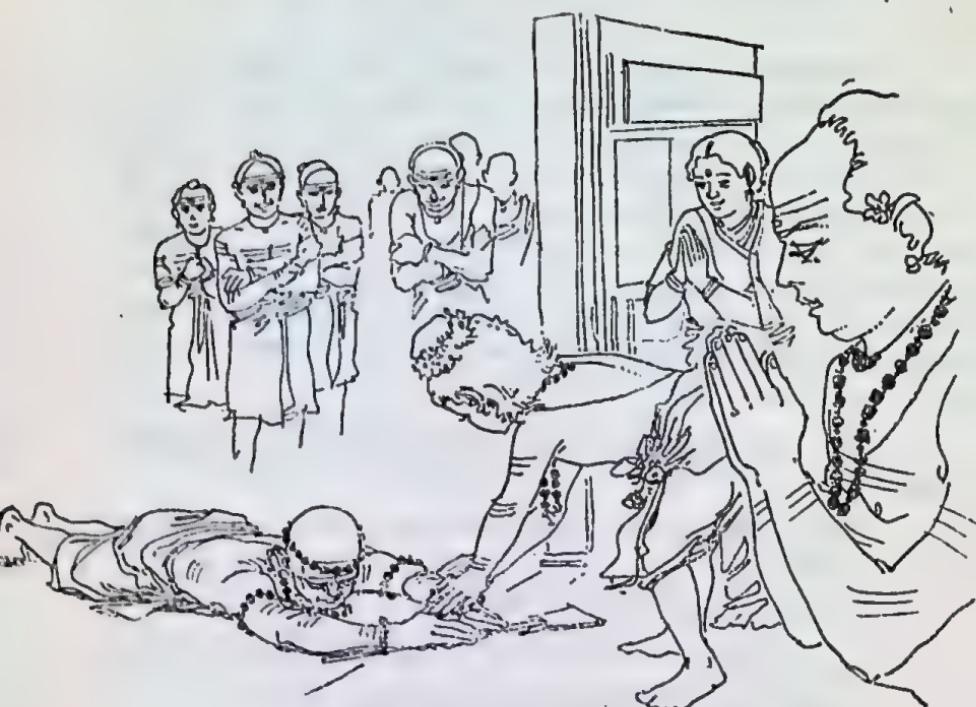
Thirunaavukkarasar,

1447-182.

* * *

He who was named Marulneekiyan at birth, and who, on his singing his very first song in defence of himself against the vile charge of apostasy, was honoured by Lord Civan Himself with the title 'Naavukkarasar', king of the gift of the tongue, he was now named *Appar* by the Son of God, a name which has

thrown into the limbo of time the former two names. Appar he was to Thirugnana-sambandhar, and Appar he is today to us all, and Appar he will be to all posterity.



This first meeting of Appar and Thirugnana-sambandhar was quite uneventful except for the three decades which Appar sang when he visited the temple in Seekaazhi in the company of Thirugnana-sambandhar. After a short stay, Appar left on his own tour of the shrines of Lord Civan in the neighbourhood and even far afield. Appar did not visit Seekaazhi again.

Thirugnana-sambandhar too grew restless and was eager to set out on his fifth tour of the shrines of Lord Civan. When his father heard of the project, he, wishing to accompany his son, told him, "On account of the rare circumstances in which I begot you, I cannot bear to be separated from you; moreover, I have to perform a Yagam which will confer joy on me here and hereafter; in the circumstances, with your permission, I shall stay some more days with you." Thus accompanied by his devoted father and

ardent devotees, Sambandhar mounted his palanquin, and set out on his fifth round of pilgrimages with great fanfare.

The Fifth Tour

Thirugnana-sambandhar's fifth tour of pilgrimages to the shrines of Lord Civan covered much time, many kilometres and many shrines, as many as nearly 165 or perhaps more. In the Thala-murai edition of our saint's songs i.e. an edition of songs arranged in the order of shrines, Sambandhar visited and honoured by singing one or more decades in them is given as 219. Sekkizhaar gives the names of such extra shrines and adds that the Son of God sang decades at those places. But those decades are not available to us today. Furthermore, in several stanzas, Sekkizhaar, in addition to mentioning one or more shrines by name in such stanzas, adds "Pira pala pathikalum sendraar"—that is to say, he visited many more shrines lying between or around the shrines mentioned by name.

When the Son of God expressed his intention to proceed on another tour of pilgrim centres, the fifth and longest in his life, his father said:

Since I begot you as a result of rare Thavam,
I cannot bear to be parted from you.
Moreover, I have to perform the Yagam,
—ritualistic sacrificial oblation to the gods,
which will yield pleasure in this life
and bliss in the other life.
With your permission,
I shall go along with you for some more days."

2178-280

* * *

This may be called the first phase of the fifth tour. This phase ended with the visit to Thiruvaavaduthurai. In terms of stanzas, 150 stanzas later, in terms of number of shrines visited, 85 shrines later, and in terms of time, it is very difficult to guess, but an estimate of two years would not be far off the mark. In terms of songs, he must have sung no less than hundred decades, that is among those which have come down to us to-day. If we take into account what is said to be lost, one thousand decades would be a very conservative estimate. All the shrines, in this

phase of this tour, were on the northern bank of the River Cauvery, and towards the west, that is upstream.

Starting from Seekaazhi on his fifth tour of pilgrim centres, Thirugnana-sambandhar, accompanied by his father visited as many as 68 shrines as named by Sekkizhaar in his chronicle, but, perhaps, as many more or if we include the shrines which Sekkizhaar lumps under the term "Pala pathikal piravaam thozhuhaar", (that is, worshipping many more on the way) and arrived at Thiruveezhi-mizhalai, a famous shrine, six and a half kilometres to the west of Kumbhakonam. The Railway station to reach this place is Swaamimalai. It goes without saying that the Son of God sang many decades in this long trip at these several shrines, but there are none of such special merit as to deserve recording here in translation. We may also say that no incident of any special significance occurred in these shrines except at Thiruppachilaachchiraamam, the 29th of the shrines he visited in this tour, where a very important incident took place. Sekkizhaar sings:—

In that tour,
 the body in full bloom of youth
 belonging to a virgin of nectar-like sweet speech,
 a girl begot by Kolli-mazhavan,
 a petty chieftain in that area,
 a fawn-like young beautiful sprig of his family,
 was afflicted with a disease called Muyalakam,
 in which she remained in a cataleptic state
 for long periods.
 The fond father and his large number of relatives
 lamented aloud about her condition
 and were in a deeply disturbed state.

* * *

When the disease could not be abated by any means,
 since the father was a man descended from a clan
 of ever holding on to the feet
 of the Lord in whose hand a fawn is reared,
 he brought the golden-creeper-like girl
 to the doors of the temple
 of the Knight of war-like appearance
 who destroyed the cities three,
 and laid her down in His presence
 that her ailment might cease.

2210-312.

* * *

On Aaaludaiya Pillaiyaar, our Thirugnana-sambandhar,
 nearing Thiruppaachchilaachiramam
 after having graciously departed from Maanthurai,
 Kolli-mazhavan heard the sound of trumpets
 and other musical instruments declaring
 that Thirugnana-sambandhar,
 who had gained the perfect true knowledge, had arrived,
 that all the worlds might be rid of their grief.
 Kolli-mazhavan, who was sobbing with grief,
 left his delicate daughter
 and hurried to the presence of Sambandhar. 211-313.

* * *

The petty chieftain immediately issued orders
 for the city to be adorned and made ready
 to receive the saint,
 and himself went before the Son of the Lord
 of the Heavenly Being
 in humble worshipful pose. 2209 to 2212-311 to 314.

* * *

Rejoicing that he had become the recipient of the grace of the Son of God arriving in his city, he went forward and prostrated before Sambandhar seated on his palanquin. On Sambandhar graciously bidding him rise from the ground, he did so and, with joined palms raised over his head, he accompanied the palanquin and entered the principal street of his ancient city. With auspicious musical instruments playing, Sambandhar went along the main street, and descended from his pearl-adorned palanquin at a point close to the outermost and well-lit tower of the temple of the Lord with the matted locks bearing the crescent moon.

When, having gone round the temple clockwise, he was about to enter the temple to pay his obeisance at the presence of the Lord,

He saw and carefully observed
 the tender tendril of a virgin
 who was in a state of loss of consciousness
 and was lying on the ground.
 He graciously asked, "What is this?"
 On his doing so,
 Mazhavai stood before him
 and worshipping him said,
 "The girl begotten by me has been afflicted
 by the rare-to-be overcome disease called 'Muyalakam'.
 On this happening to her,

I had her brought before the temple
of the Immaculate One.
This is exactly how she happened
to enter the premises.”
Saying so, he respectfully stood before him.

* * *

The very moment Sambandhar
graciously heard the words
uttered by the chieftain
of the garland which shone like an ornament,
he worshipped the Transcendent Being
of matted locks inhabited by the snake
who was abiding at Paachchil
and sang a decad in which he asked:
“Is it really the Lord
in whose Adam’s apple shines a gem
who has afflicted her senses
and made this maiden suffer?
Is such His magnanimity?”
Thus sang the Lord of Senbai
in sweet Tamil a decad
to rid her of the unyielding disease.

2215 to 2216-317, 318

* * *

This is the first stanza of the song:

“The Lord who has coiled up
and tied in a tier-like form
his shining-bright matted locks
in which the wrong-doer of a moon shines brilliantly;
the Lord who is in the habit
of breeding a snake in His locks,
He, who surrounded by His band of ghouls,
begs His food from anyone and everyone,
The Lord bedecked with jewels
which enhance His beauty,
He who abides in Paachchilaachchiramam,
He who has a prominent Adam’s apple
adorned by a gem,
is it proper that He should affect her
with a catalepsy
and make the maid suffer?
Is this His greatness?”

Vol. I. d. 44. st. 1.

* * *

Thus having sung the decad
 which is the set-to-music Tamil Vedas
 and having adorned it with the holy end-lines,
 when the eternal One of the Kauniyar sect
 stood paying obeisance to the Lord,
 the maiden of soft words
 like the prattle of a child,
 who was begot by the Mazhavan,
 freed from the disease which had afflicted her,
 suddenly rose from the ground
 and standing like a golden creeper,
 walked to one side,
 came near her father mighty in war
 and stood close to him.

2217-319.

* * *

Thiruvalluvar said:

Those who are entitled to be called "The Compassionate"
 are only the ascetics,
 since they alone conduct themselves
 with compassion towards every creature on earth.

It was sheer compassion which impelled Sambandhar to cure the virgin afflicted with catalepsy. This is the first of the very few miracles performed by Sambandhar. It is wrong to call it a miracle. By constant abuse, it has become a cheap word. By the power of his being the Son of God, he pleaded with his Father and succeeded in persuading Him to respond to his appeal.

Two shrines thereafter, namely Thiruppaingelee and Eangoimalai, he crossed over to the southern bank of River Cauvery, and after visiting a shrine or two he arrived at Chenkundroor, now called Thiruchechenkodu. Here occurred the third major incident of the evincement of compassion of Lord Civan, the Father, to His son, Thirugnana-sambandhar. Let us hear Sekkizhaar relate it. He sings:

During the days
 the Child stayed in that town,
 when the rains, poured by the banks of clouds
 bearing the ready-to-fall gathering drops, had ceased,
 and a desire had risen
 in all the world girt by billowy waters
 to receive some sunshine,
 the in-between season of cold, early dews set in
 on all the hills around.

* * *

The swarms of bees left in disgust,
the lotuses become shrivelled by the frost;
like beadlets of quartz
strung on a green creeper,
beadlets of dew swayed
on the tips of blades of delicate Aruhu grass,
and the hillocks looked
as if they were covered by a white shawl,
unable to withstand the cold. 2226, 2227-328, 329

In that ancient city,
in all the caves on all the roofs of the city
male pigeons with coral-tinted feet
crouched with their mates,
and in the hollows of the warm breasts—
which resembled twin cupolas—
of their respective woman
with soft tresses decked with Piththikais,
a kind of flower said to diffuse warmth
as they open their petals inside the tresses,
nestled the hefty shoulders
and the beautiful chests
of their respective men folk.

2229-331.

On such days of bitter cold of the early dew season, the retinue of devotees who were with Sambandhar, on account of their having stayed there a long time, were attacked by the fever which is preceded by much shivering. When they stated their condition to the Son of God and entreated him to relieve them of their distress, the Son of God paid his obeisance to the grace of Him who was the foremost of everything on earth, and sang a decad in praise of Him who has adorned His head with the moon, in which he stated that he had thought

"this is a regular feature of this land, it will not affect us".

Turning round upon his retinue he sang:

"You know very well the saying that this Vinai,
this deed, this incident,
is a repercussion of that Vinai (Karma) done in the past.
Is it not a matter for disgrace
for you not to seek
a way of redemption from the effect of that cause?
Let us, slaves to the Lord,

do service unto our neighbours
and praise the feet of our Lord.

In that case, the Vinai done by us in the past
will not come upon us, and touch us.

I swear this by the Holy Blue Throat of the Lord.

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* * *

Let us pause here and meditate on the teaching of the Son of God. "Serve your neighbours, and your past (evil) deeds will be powerless to affect you."

Without caring to know the message of the Son of God, we continue to suffer (or enjoy) from the Prarabdha Karma as if it is an inevitable process which we cannot avert. But the Son of God teaches us otherwise: Serve your neighbour.

The Lord once again showed his paternal solicitude for His Son. He saved him and his retinue from the malaria even now common in that region.

A few shrines later Sambandhar turned eastward and crossed over to the south bank of the River Cauvery. According to Sekkizhaar, the first shrine he visited was Thirupparaai-th-thurai.

The Son of God covered the shrines in Thiruchirapalli and its environs and passed on to Thanjavoor District. One of the shrines he visited was Aval-ival-nalloor, a village ten and a half kilometres to the north east of Saaliyamangalam, a railway station between Thanjavoor and Needamangalam. The name has an interesting history. A Brahmana who had married the elder daughter of the Brahmana who conducts the six daily services in the temple had gone away on a long pilgrimage. The lovely wife he left was attacked by small-pox and was rendered a hideous person to look at. The husband, on his return, refused to believe that the horrid-looking woman was his wife and insisted that her younger sister was his wife. The dispute became insoluble till God, in His boundless mercy, came forward as a witness and said that "she whom you left as a ravishing young beauty is this same woman". God's mercy is unbounded. From this incident the village takes its name—*Aval* (that woman you have in mind) is *ival* (this woman), *Nalloor* good village.

He continued on his pilgrimage and arrived at Thiruvalanjuzhi the 67th shrine in this long tour. He resided there for quite a long while and kept worshipping daily the Lord abiding therein. Then the summer set in. Sekkizhaar thus describes the summer:

While he was living with delight therein,
the sun traversing the heavens
entered the zodiacal sign Gemini,
and, as a consequence,
the summer grew intense
on account of the sun
angrily spreading its cruel rays
to such an extent
that even the seven seas
shrank in their expanse.

* * *

The summer grew so intense that people longed for
the breeze which had travelled over cool waters,
fragrant sandal-wood paste,
the dew-collected in flowers
of long-standing mild fragrance,
the pleasant company of their wives,
ornaments made of pearls of soft brilliance,
and food of pleasant taste suitable to the season.

* * *

Deer driven by their thirst,
arriving at the forest streams of black sand,
followed the mirage believing it to be rare-to-obtain water;
and birds which obtain their food from ponds and streams
grew despondent and went in search of other food,
and other birds fanning out their wings,
sought cool places to roost in.

* * *

Folks gathered together,
their face blossoming with delight,
on the terraces of tall mansions,
on the verandahs of the courtyards
where the moon shines,
in the groves offering plenty of shade,
on the banks of flower-laden tanks,
and also looked with wistful longing
at the breasts of women of flower-decked tresses
who wore shining ornaments set with pearls.

2282 to 2285-384 to 387

* * *

With peacocks, their fan-tails furled up,
 hiding from the heat,
 with bees dancing around,
 with lotus bud unfurling its petals,
 with Kuyil pecking at tender mango leaves,
 and raising its voice in the groves of trees
 whose leaves did not furl up,
 with all the creatures
 who never sleep in the daytime,
 now indulging in sleep,
 the unabating heat-shedding sun alone
 in the fiery sky
 spread itself everywhere.

* * *

Sambandhar paid his homage to the Lord at Valanjuzhi and set out for Pazhayaarai along with his retinue of devotees. On this occasion, he paid homage to the Lord abiding in a temple called 'Merrthali', 'The West Temple'. After visiting two other shrines in the neighbourhood, he returned to Pazhayaarai to pay homage to the Lord abiding in a temple called 'Vadathali', 'The North Temple.'

This second visit to Pazhayaarai would not have been worthy of dwelling upon but for two facts. When Sambandhar visited this shrine as the 69th in the long list of shrines he visited during his 5th tour of pilgrimage, this temple of Lord Civan was in a state of good repair. Sekkizhaar makes just a passing mention of this visit. He sings:

Sambandhar, who was staying
 in that pilgrimage centre, (Thiru-p-patti-eecharam),
 went to Thiry-aarrai-vada-thali of ineffable glory
 and paid homage to the Lord
 in matchless Tamil song.
 From there, accompanied by the devotees
 who were with him,
 he proceeded and arrived at Irumpoolai,
 the abode of Him
 Who is all things in the universe. 2297—399

* * *

Between the date of this visit, which could probably have taken place in the 9th year of Sambandhar, perhaps, in 669 A.D., and the visit of Appar to the same shrine, perhaps only a month

later, the Jains had demolished the temple. The two visits of Sambandhar must have triggered off the Jain monks to this act of vandalism, lest visits to the temple by luminaries like Sambandhar should stir the heart of the converted king and make him repent his conversion. Therefore they had walled up the temple and had built on the ruins a Jain temple.

This was the condition when Appar visited Pazhayaarai. Perhaps, in the history of the world, for the first time, a man, no less a person than Appar vowed that he would not eat even a grain of food or drink a drop of water till the superstructure had been demolished and the ancient temple had been restored to its original glory. The king of the land, God bless him, carried out the wishes of Appar and spared him from a tortuous death. After the first visit to Pazhayaarai, Sambandhar visited Thiruchchattechcharam, when,

The Host of Ghouls told him
that in order to protect him from the sun
of the heat-radiating summer,
they had been sent by their Lord
to hold a pearl-set umbrella
over the head of the Expert
in the three branches of Tamil
(namely, prose, poetry and drama).

2290-392.

* * *

When those words and the canopy of pearls
rose in the sky,
the child with experience of perfect gnosis,
who hailed from Cirapuram said:
“If this deed is the holy grace of God,
it is agreeable to us.”
And with the hair on his body
prickling with devotion and delight,
he prostrated on the ground.

2291-393.

* * *

This is another deed of solicitious compassion of the Father of all beings to His Son.

After visiting another dozen shrines, Sambandhar arrived at Thiruvaavaduthurai, which today is the headquarters of the most ancient of the three Caiva-Siddhaantha Mutts. In the fifth century A.D. Thirumoolar lived for a long while at this place.

The reader will remember that when Sambandhar had set out on his fifth tour, his father had requested to be permitted to accompany him and, incidentally, had mentioned that he had a "Velvi", Yagam to perform. Now, his father reminded his son of the need for funds to perform the 'Velvi' and the necessity to return to Sekkaazhi.

On hearing the words of his father,
the First Citizen of Pukali
remembering the promise
he had given him long ago,
placed his trust in the grace of God, and saying:
"Are not the feet of my Heavenly Father
who abides in Aavaduthurai
real infinite wealth?".

2312-423.

* * *

He set out to the temple. There standing in the presence of Lord Civan, Sambandhar sang a decad with joined palms held over his head. Sekkizhaar relates:

By the grace of God,
who had all along graciously carried out
the wishes of Gnana-sambandhar
who expressed his desire in sweet Tamil,
the ghoul who performs such wonders,
hurried forward and placed
on top of the broad sacrificial platform
a purse of one thousand pieces of pure gold. 2323-426

* * *

The ghoul which placed the purse thereon
came near, and, standing before Sambandhar announced:
"This purse which I have placed here
is a purse of inexhaustible gold;
this has been granted to you
by the grace of the Eternal Being."
Sambandhar worshipping the messenger,
the message, and the grace
evidenced by both,
meditated on the holy grace of the Father,
and fell prostrate on the ground. 23x5-427.

* * *

There was nothing inappropriate in the Child of God requesting his Father for gold for performing a Velvi prescribed in

the Vedas. He did not beg of a chieftain or a king, but only of the Creator, who gladly fulfilled his request.

He worshipped the Lord, rose up, took up the purse of gold and, handing it over to his father, said, "This purse will be more than sufficient for you and the Vaidic Brahmanas in Thirukkazhulam to perform the good 'Velvi' with the Lord wearing the chaplet enclosing in it the River Ganga as the principal presiding deity of a 'Velvi' which has been prescribed by the rules laid down by the primordial great Vedas."

Saying so, he gave his father leave to go back to Pukali. After this parting, father and son did not meet each other till after Sambandhar had routed the Jains in Madurai and was continuing his fifth pilgrimage to the very southern tip of Tamilnadu — Rameswaram.

The father later on accompanied his son to many shrines but again parted from him after Samabandhar had returned to Seekaaazhi after his fifth tour of pilgrimages.

Thirugnana-sambandhar continued his pilgrimage, and, after visiting another thirteen shrines came to Dharmapuram which should not be confused with the Dharmapuram on the outskirts of Mayilaaduthurai which is the Headquarters of a famous Caiva-Siddhaantha Mutt.

Thiruneelakanta-p-perumpaauar proudly announced that Dharmapuram was the birth-place of his mother, and Sambandhar graciously deigned to tarry a day or two at that place and honour the player on the Yaazh. The relatives of Thiruneelakanta-yaazh-p-paanar were very proud of his skill in playing on the Yaazh. Therefore, they unwisely boasted that Thirugnana-sambandhar's songs were enhanced in their merit by Yaazh-p-paanar accompanying the songs on his instrument. When these boasts reached the ears of the Yaazh-p-paanar, he was horrified at this unworthy praise and pleaded with Sambandhar to sing a song which he would not be able by any means to accompany on his stringed instrument. Sambandhar obliged his devotee by singing a decad called Yaazh-muri — the decad which defies accompaniment on the Yaazh. Though it was sung at the voluntary request of the Yaazh-p-paanar, his failure drove him to the desperate act of trying to smash his instrument against a stone column. Sambandhar restrained and

pacified him, and persuaded him to continue to accompany his songs on the instrument to the last day of their lives on earth.

*Muadhar mada-p-pidiyum mada annamum annathor
nadai-udai-malaimakal thunai ena makizhvar:
bhootha ina-p-padai nindru isai paadavum aaduvar;
avar padar-sadai nedu mudiathor punalar;
vedamodu ezhuisai paaduvar; aazh-kadal venthu
irai nurai karai poruthu vimmu nidru ayale
thazthavizh punnai thayangu nalar-ch-chirai vandarai
ezhil pozhil kuyil payil dharumapuram pathiye.*

Vol. I-136-1.

Rejoices He in having as His life-mate
the Mountain-Maid

Who has a gait
like that of the beautiful female elephant,
and like that of the female swan;
Dances He while the Host of Ghouls stand round Him
and sing songs:

A river has He atop the coil
of His spread out matted locks;
The Vedas set to the notes of music sings He;
His city is Dharmapuram
which is girt by beautiful groves,
where the Kuyil plies its music,
and bees, hovering over pollen-shedding flowers
hanging from boughs of Punnai trees, hum,
and is situated on the sea-shore
which the white-foam-crested waves of the deep sea charge
and break with sobs.

*

*

*

Sambandhar continued his pilgrimage and arrived at Thiruchhaaththamangai, the 100th shrine in his fifth tour. Here lived Saint Thiruneelanakkār. He invited Sambandhar to stay with him. We have related a part of the chronicle of this saint in Chapter XV called "A Wraith that Walked on its Head." That incident did not reflect much credit on him. But now Saint Thiruneelanakkār wiped off that discredit which he earned more through a strict adherence to the normally correct belief not only of his times but of our times as well that to blow with one's mouth on the Lingam or any other image of God caused a pollution as an invisible spray of spittle must necessarily be a part of the air blown with one's mouth at anything. The then ignorant Brahmana did not realize

that throwing a stone as an offering on a Lingam, that bathing a Lingam with water carried in one's mouth, that shaking down flowers stuck on one's tuft of hair on to the head of the Lingam, that to offer roasted boar's meat to God, and, to crown all, to keep one's sandalled feet on the bleeding eye of the Lord so that when one's other eye is gouged for transplantation one should know where to transplant the gouged-out eye, the other having been already gouged out and transplanted in place of a bleeding eye of the Lord—the ignorant Brahmana did not realise that all these sacrilegious acts were accepted by God as greatest acts of love.

To return to our story of rehabilitation of Thiruneela-nakkar in the eyes of God and of man: He invited Sambandhar to his house and prayed to the Son of God to dine at his house. When the time came for all people to go to bed, let us hear Sekkizhaar relate what happened. He sings thus in the chronicle of Thiruneelanakkars. We might feel that Sekkizhaar would have done well if he had recorded that redeeming incident at this stage of the biography of Sambandhar. But Sekkizhaar, a man of very great artistry, correctly recorded this incident in the same chronicle where this saint's lack of perception of the motherly love which lay behind an apparent act of sacrilege by his wife was recorded. Sekkizhaar sings:

In the days when Neelanakkars
of great nobility of character,
was thus leading his life,
the Prince of Senbai who was visiting—
several good shrines—
established with the intent
that the world might gain
the great fruits of Thavams—
in order to worship the Lord
with the chaplet which contains within it
the water descending from the sky.
arrived at Saaththamangai.

1850-23.

* * *

Neelanakkars was delighted to hear
about the arrival of the great man of Pukali.
along with his large retinue
which swelled with devotees joining it at every step,
and about the preceding arrival
of Thiruneelakanda-p-perum-paanar of long repute
along with his Viraliyaar—

the spouse with tresses
decked with blossoming flowers:

1851-24

* * *

The moment he heard the news, he arranged for the decoration of the town and the spreading of the 'red carpet' all along the way and, taking along with him a crowd of kinsmen, set out to receive them.

He went forward and, joining with the sacred crowd accompanying the saint, was beside himself with joy, danced and sang and worshipped the Son of God, and took them to his house. He fed the munificent Lord of famous Seekaazhi and his retinue in a fitting manner. After dinner, when the sun was setting in the west, he made arrangements for the Son of God and his retinue to stay the night at his house.

After feasting the meritorious devotees, when the Son of God, who had wept till the Lord on the boat and His consort arrived that the world might prosper, sent for him, Neelanakkār came and fell at his feet and stood awaiting his orders.

To the devotee who thus stood before him, the Son of God said:

"Do graciously provide a place for Neelakanta-p-perum-paanar
to stay tonight."

On his saying so,
Neelanakkār said, "Well, so be it", and with delight
the holy Brahmana went up to the side of the Yagna fire
pits,
in the middle of the house
and gave him a place to sleep in.

1858-31

* * *

There the fire, which had not gone out in the fire-pits,
shot up in clockwise manner
and shone better than before.
The Brahmana, who bore the sacred thread, was delighted
and the virtuoso of the Yaazh,
took his bed there by the grace of God
along with his cultured wife.

1858-31

* * *

It is evident that in Thirugnana-sambandhar's time, feeling of caste gave way before love of Lord Civan, and Thirunavukkarasar told nothing but the truth when he sang.

Sanga-nidhi, padhumia-nidhi—
 Billions and trillions of riches,
 even if they gave me both,
 and, besides, gave me power
 to rule over the earth and the heavens,
 to the wealth of such people,
 who came from dust and to dust will return,
 regard we will not pay,
 if they are not single-minded devotees of Maadevan,
 The Great Lord!

(On the other hand)
 with all limbs eaten away and rotted too,
 lepers though they be,
 and, besides, they are Pulayars—flesh eaters—
 who strip the hides of (dead) cows
 and eat their carrion,
 provided they are devotees of the Lord
 who contained within His matted locks the River Ganga,
 note that they are the gods we worship.

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* * *

Three shrines later, Sambandhar met Siruththondar at Senkaaththamkudi. Sekkizhaar does not tell us whether this meeting took place after Siruththondar had sacrificed his only son or before.

At Thirumarukal, the next pilgrimage centre, another noble act of supreme compassion was performed by Lord Civan on the intercession of Sambandhar. Let us hear Sekkizhaar relate it.

Graciously arriving at Thirumarukal,
 he worshipped the feet of Maanikka-vannar—
 He of the colour of the ruby—
 who has a crown of long matted locks
 wherein the moon and the fiery-eyed snake
 live together in peace—
 and paid his obeisance.
 With melting love internally agitating him,
 he adorned the Lord with a garland of song
 rich in Tamil words
 of pregnant meaning-infused music.
 Thus there stayed the Son of great Pukali.

* * *

On one of those days,
 while a merchant,
 who, taking along with him a virgin,
 had turned a wayfarer,
 was sleeping during the night in a Mutt
 just outside but near the temple of the Lord
 with a bow of shining golden Meru,
 a white-toothed snake
 plunged its fangs into him like lightning,
 and the power of the discharged poison
 rapidly went to his head.
 Noticing the condition of him,
 who was fast giving up his life,
 the young virgin, a feast for all the five senses,
 lost her presence of mind and fainted off.

* * *

Even when the snake had struck him
 she did not touch him.
 Without anyone to give her a comforting word,
 she, like an uprooted flower-creeper,
 fell down beside him who looked like a male lion,
 and was wailing her lament.
 When magicians,
 who resembled the lighting and the King of all birds,
 had failed to reduce the virulence of the fell poison
 by all the means in their command,
 and when the long long night blossomed into the morning,
 the young girl decked with fragrant flowers
 on her curly tresses,
 wearied beyond endurance, wailed.
 Deserting my mother and father,
 with you as my refuge,
 I eloped with you;
 bitten by a snake
 you gave up your life
 and deserted me;
 what shall I do now?
 There is no one to relieve me of this misery,
 O Gem of the eternally renowned clan of traders,
 I too shall not live any longer.
 Saying so, the grief-stricken girl,
 wisely turned in the direction
 of the gate of the temple of the Lord
 who wears on His head a baby moon,
 and worshipped with joined palms.
 Thus did the girl, bereft of any other course of action.

* * *

"O Amrit who ate the poison
 thrown up by the wave-tossed sea
 that the concourse of devotees—
 the heavenly beings—might be redeemed!
 O Pure One who wears
 a snake emitting blue poison
 and who has a form
 which the Tall One and the Four-faced One
 could never see!
 O virtuous One
 who, on Rati appealing to you,
 gave back with delight the life of Kaaman
 who had been reduced to ashes!
 O Great Lord of beautiful Marukal,
 surrounded on all sides
 by sweet-smelling flower groves,
 do save me.

* * *

"O Lord with rosy feet which kicked
 the Lord of Death
 with red cruel eyes like rings of poison,
 white teeth, black appearance,
 to such effect that he lost his balance and fell down
 when with rage he pounced upon the life
 of the young Brahmana boy
 who sought Your protection!
 O Lord of Marukal
 who wears a chaplet
 in which grows the twilight baby moon,
 do graciously will that the cruel speed
 of the virulent poison may be reduced
 and I may ascend from the pit of this calamity
 into which I have fallen."

* * *

That kind of wail made by the girl,
 with a waist swaying
 like a tender tendril of a creeper,
 who
 thuswise, meditating on Civan's grace only,
 was praying yearningly for the restoration
 of the life of her lover,
 rose in the air
 and reached the sacred ears—
 which seemed as if all noble qualities
 had taken that shape—

of our Senbai's Chivalrous Knight—
 who was coming to the temple to worship the Lord.
 On the sound reaching his ears,
 the compassion in his sacred heart
 becoming more and more set on her
 who, like a dying swan, was wailing thus,
 Sambandhar surrounded by his retinue of great *thavam*
 graciously approached her.

* * *

The Vaidic Brahmana of Civapuram
 went, and, standing beside her,
 paid obeisance to the grace of Lord Civan,
 and, looking at her,
 who, with a broken heart, was sunk in grief, said:
 "Fear not! Tell me your trouble
 and your respective states."



On his saying so,
 her blossom-like palms joined over her head,
 her eyes pouring forth streams of tears,
 she fell at the feet of the Vaidic Patron of Kaazhi,
 and related how they came here
 and how the trouble entered their lives.

* * *

"Thaaman, the King of Vaipoor
 surrounded by flourishing groves, is my father,

This man here is his sister's son.
 To him, my father, seven are the daughters,
 all like baby elephants in their way of walking.
 Though he had given word
 that the eldest of them
 was for this man only;
 even so, after he had given her in marriage
 to a stranger on receiving wealth
 to his heart's content,
 he married off all his other daughters except myself
 in similar manner to others.
 Therefore, taking pity on this man here
 who was wasting away with a broken heart,
 I hid from my father
 and have accompanied this man."

* * *

But alas, this man,
 On the snake striking him, has died.
 I am standing here
 stranded like a person
 whose ship has capsized in the sea.
 Like a close kinsman,
 you have appeared before me
 and have been gracious enough
 to console me in my grief."
 On her saying so,
 the Prince of Kaazhi,
 worshipped and adored by the learned,
 moved by compassion to bestow grace
 on this young woman,
 began to address in song
 the Lord in Marukal surrounded by fields
 that the venom of the cruel snake
 which had bitten the young man
 might lose its power.

* * *

The Lord with the matted locks,
 He who is the mother of all creatures,
 Lord Sankaran,
 He with a crown of a crescent moon,
 the Owner of the bull,
 the Author of the Vedas,
 He with the white ash,
 He with the weapon which demolished by fire
 the fortresses three of the unfriendly ones,

He with the form
 which he seated on the lotus
 and he who sleeps on a bed of a coiled snake
 worship with songs—
 Sambandhar addressed such a Person
 with a song commencing with the words;
 “O my Owner! Is it proper
 that this lissom maid suffer thus in her heart?”

* * *

(On Sambandhar praying thus)
 the young man, rid of the raging poison, stood up;
 and, while the retinue of matchless sacred devotees
 hailed with delight,
 the Prince of shady dark groves abounding Pukali
 performed on the spot
 the great event of marriage of the maiden
 with her lover
 who, with the palms of his beautiful hands
 joined over his head as sign of obeisance,
 fell at the feet of the Son of God
 hailing from Kaazhi. 2370 to 2381—472 to 483

* * *

It must be remembered that elopement was an accepted social custom for true lovers, and the love between these two was pure.

Sambandhar proceeded on his tour, which he could never abandon. He arrived at Poom-pukaloor, the 104th shrine in his fifth tour. Here lived Murukanaar, a great devotee, whose service to the Lord took the form of gathering fresh fragrant flowers fit for the adornment of Lord Civan. He had, besides, the honour of being the friend of Sambandhar, him to whom the Mother of the Universe fed gnosis along with the milk she drew from her breast in a golden bowl. He later gained the feet of Lord Civan at the same time as Sambandhar himself when he had been to Nalloor-p-perumanam to attend the wedding of Sambandhar. He entered the Effulgence which was Lord Civan along with the bridal couple and the scores of devotees who attended that unique wedding. Such was Thirumurukanaar, a Brahmana resident of Thiru-p-pukaloor who gained Mukti by the simple but love-imbued act of stringing garlands of flowers for the Lord.

He invited Sambandhar to stay a few days with him. Here

occurred two most momentous incidents in the life of Thirugnana-sambandhar. Let us hear Sekkizhaar relate it. During the days

Sambandhar stayed at that holy place,
the veritable King of great skill in wielding words,
having worshipped the Lord
who had taken abode in an anthill,
and having paid homage in praise of Aaroor
of golden ramparts,
thought of worshipping Thiruppukaloor,
where dwelt Lord Civan,
the Partner of Her of slender waist and golden bangles,
and
neared that place
accompanied by a retinue of devotees
who had received the grace of God.

2390-492.

The very moment Thirugnana-sambandhar,
the Son of the Lord resplendently seated on the bull,
heard the good happy news
of Navukkarasu graciously nearing Pukaloor,
his heart filled with love,
and desire to meet Arasu swelled therein;
forthwith he hurried along with his devoted retinue
and crossed the outskirts of Pukaloor
surrounded by ponds filled with lovely flowers,
in order to receive Appar.

* * *

The Lion among Brahmanas
who had come from Pukali of swelling cool waters
arrived in a befitting manner,
just at the time Arasu
who was coming after worshipping Aaroor
of the Lord with the beautiful eyes,
arrived at the outskirts,
and, in accordance with the practice
established by their mutual love,
the two fell prostrate at each other's feet
and paid homage to each other.
Later, while they were engaged rejoicingly
in exchanging news about the glad happenings
since they last met,

* * *

holy Gnana-sambandhar of godly nature,
addressing the King of Speech, said:

"We are, indeed, very blessed,
as we have the good fortune
of Appar arriving here
on account of our attachment to each other,"
and asked:
"How did you enjoy your visit to cool Aaroor
to worship the Lord?"
The man of limitless great Thavam
replied through his garland of fecund Tamil,
the grandeur of the celebration
of Thiruvaathirai at Aaroor. 2390 to 2393—492 to 495

* * *

Thirugnana-sambandhar was so much impressed by Appar's description of Aaroor and its sanctity that he decided to go immediately to Aaroor for a Darsan of Thyagesar. He abandoned Appar to his own devices of spending his time at Thirupukkaloor and set out for Aaroor. The next twenty stanzas describe in tempting detail Sambandhar's delight at his visit to Aaroor.

Sambandhar finally tore himself away from Thiruvaaroor which was exercising an indescribable fascination on him. Sekkizhaar sings thus:

After several days had passed thus
in happily staying at Thiruvaaroor,
Sambandhar longing for the company
of our Thirunavukkarasar,
and desirous of worshipping the Lord
at Pukaloor of ever growing fame
graciously arrived at the outskirts
of the town he was staying in.

* * *

Going out of Aaroor,
the best of places in the world,
he stood looking back at it,
and, addressing his heart, he sang,
"O my heart,
who has not wasted your time,
fear not; know the means of redemption.
Never forget to worship
Aaroor of Lord Civan."
Saying so, he joined his rosy palms
and sang the decad beginning thus:
"Pavanamaai-ch-chodaiyaa". 2415, 2416—517, 518

* * *

The phrase, "Avamilaa nenjamae!" 'O my heart who has not wasted your time!' used by Sekkizhaar in the above stanzas seems a little inappropriate. Sambandhar an Isvarakoti would never have paid his heart such a compliment. The decad sung by Sambandhar is free from such a breach of good taste. The relevant stanza runs.

Why are you despondent like fools,
who had never meditated on the feet of Civan,
feel when they lie on their death-bed,
with stridulous breath and parched tongue,
and drop by drop drip feed
from cotton swab dipped in milk?
Redeemed can you be by worshipping Aaroor
of the Lord of the dusky throat
who delights in riding on the bull
which rushes rapidly about.
Doubt not, dread not, O my heart!

After visiting a shrine or two on the way, Sambandhar was back at Pukaloor where Murukanaar and Arasu received him with great pomp and glory and joy. Saint Thiruneelanakkarr and Saint Siruththondar also joined them and they all spent a few days happily there. But soon he was seized again by a desire to worship Lord Civan at many other shrines. Appar accompanied him, and, while Thiruneelanakkarr and Siruththondar took their leave and went back to their respective towns, Murukanaar stayed back at Pukaloor.

In this 5th round of tours of pilgrimage centres, Sambandhar had till now travelled alone to no less than 13 shrines including those which Sri C.K. Subramaniya Muthaliyaar has surmised as being the ones which Sekkizhaar frequently lumps under the words "Pira pathikalum thozhuthu". We must not forget that while Sekkizhaar tells us that Sambandhar visited these shrines with the desire to worship Lord Civan, there was an equally, if not more important reason for these visits. Sambandhar was fulfilling the reason for his birth on earth at his own will, as only an Isvarakoti could, in response to the prayer of Civa-paada-hirudayar for a son to restore Caivaism to its ancient glory. The first phase was to awaken the numbed people of the land to a realisation of the glory of their religion, of their God, of their

very hamlets, villages, towns and cities. Till he had done so, any attempt to rout Jainism from its position in the Court of the Pandiyan would have been a failure.

From now on, Appar accompanied him to 27 shrines till they parted at Thirumaraikkaadu. When they set out from Pukaloor... Sambandhar did not get into his palanquin but began to walk along with Appar. However, at Appar's special plea, he agreed to ride in his palanquin, but requested Appar to go ahead, and wait for him at the shrines they visited together.

Let us recall to our mind that on the first meeting of Sambandhar and Appar at Seekaazhi, the meeting was a very short one as befitting the first meeting of two strangers, the visit being the result of a curiosity and desire on the part of Appar to see this young lad, not yet seven years old, of whom he has heard so much wherever he went. The second meeting was of a totally different nature.

Even if both the saints had sensed some divine purpose in the curiosity which impelled Appar to travel to Seekaazhi, and, correspondingly, in the impulse which impelled Sambandhar to cry out, "Appare!", yet it is clear from Sekkizhaar's account of the lives of both of them that both the saints did not see in their first meeting anything much more than a courtesy call.

The second meeting, however, was something like John the Baptist meeting Jesus Christ and giving him baptism in the waters of Jordan. People of insight and of unbiased mind will see in this meeting that Thirugnana-sambandhar's investiture with the sacred thread was completed by his falling at the feet of Appar, the Baptist, in more than one sense. Both the saints now set out together on the tour of pilgrimage centres, which, in the case of Sambandhar was the second leg of his fifth tour. They journeyed together through twenty-seven shrines, beginning from Thiruppukaloor, which is in East Thanjavoor District of Tamilnadu, about 31 kilometres from Mayilaaduthurai Railway Junction, and 6 kilometres from Nannilam. They parted company at Thirumaraik-kaadu, now called Vedaaranyam, a coastal town which is about 80 kilometres from Kaaraikkal as the crow flies.

How long this joint tour took, one cannot say; but much must have been said by Appar to Sambandhar about the cruel supremacy of Jainism and of the various forms of tortures he suffered at the hands of the Jain monks. It is however, remarkable that Appar's 4,000 and odd stanzas are singularly free from bitterness or hatred.

During the months Appar accompanied Sambandhar, he must have briefed him to such good purpose that when Queen Mangayarkkarasi and Kulachchiraiyar, the Chief Minister of Paandiyan the Hunchback sent emissaries to advise him of the conditions in Paandinaadu, he was ready to go with them. We cannot over-emphasise the great service Appar, the Solicitor, did in preparing the soil of the mind of Sambandhar, the Prosecuting Attorney, to receive the seed of righteous resolve to put an end to the atrocities of the fanatical Jain monks. The Jains then and today have been and are lovable people, but when by indifference we allow the wicked to gain power, we share the shame.

This leg of the fifth tour had its share of very remarkable incidents. The second pilgrimage centre on this leg of the tour was Thirukkadavoor, famous for two incidents which occurred therein. According to his Prarabdha Karma, Maarkandeyan, a great devotee of Lord Civan, had a life-span of only sixteen years. On the appointed day, accordingly the myrmidons of the Lord of Death went to fetch the life of the lad. But the lad ran into the sanctum-sanctorum of the temple in Kadavoor, and entwined his arms round the Lingam there. The servants of the God of Death dared not enter the sacred precincts, and reported the matter to their master. Enraged at the failure of his servants, the Lord of Death mounted his steed, a wild bison, and rode forth with his lasso to rope in the life of the lad. He bravely rode right into the holy of holies and whipped the lasso round the head of the lad, and, incidentally, round the Lingam. Forthwith, Lord Civan burst out of the Lingam and kicked down with His left foot the God of Death. Death, not daring to defy the Lord, fled away in terror.

Another incident connected with this shrine is of much later date, perhaps the 18th century. There lived a great devotee called

Abhiraami Bhattar in that place. He was always found in deep contemplation of Abhiraami, the name by which Paarvati, the Consort of Lord Civan, goes in that shrine. Once, the king of the realm visited the shrine and saw this saint engaged in contemplation, totally blind and deaf to all the clamour which usually occurs on the visit of a king to a shrine. The king's curiosity was roused, and he went near the saint and brought him back to the mundane world. The king wanted to ask a question, and, as often happens in such cases, asked a silly question. He asked the saint, "What day of the lunar fortnight is today?" The saint answered without a moment's hesitation, "Well, today is the full-moon day." The king flew into a rage. For, actually, it was the new-moon day. The king strutted away threatening the saint with dire punishment if, when he returned in the evening, the saint did not show him a full moon.

It took some time for the saint to realise his horrible predicament. For, having been brutally brought back to mundane consciousness from his contemplation of Abhiraami who was Effulgence Incarnate, he had put into words his recollection of a vision more recent than it takes to wink. Therefore, forthwith, he sang the 'Abhiraami Anthaathi', a hundred songs pleading to be saved from the plight that awaited him. The king came in the evening and, just as he had threatened, was ready to punish the saint. But the saint, blind and deaf to the world, was singing his garland of 100 stanzas. Just as he was singing the 79th song, the king, perhaps bored to death by the long succession of songs, dozed off. Then he had a dream. He saw that the whole place was lit with the cool bright light of the full-moon. He woke, his body all wet with sweat at having insulted such a saint, and fell at the feet of the saint and begged his pardon. The 79th song was this:

Grace have I
of the eyes of Abhiraamavalli;
heart have I
to worship her in the way
prescribed by the Vedas;
While I have this resource,
what need have I anymore
for companionship of vile men
who, wallowing in reprehensible deeds,

and doing cruel sins only,
are qualifying to sink in the pit
of horrible hell?

* * *

In the life-time of Sambandhar this place did a hat-trick, and acquired a reputation as high as those earned by the former incident. Here was born and here resided saint Kungiliya-p-perumkalayanaar who took advantage of Sambandhar's visit to his birth-place to host a dinner to the Son of God and his retinue. More about him later.

From Kadavoor, they proceeded through three shrines and arrived at Thiruveezhi-mizhalai.

The towns-folk of Seekaazhi were sore grieved and sent a deputation to Sambandhar at Thiruveezhi-mizhalai to plead with him to return home. He sent them back and continued to stay at Veezhimizhalai. He was rewarded by God for this act by giving him a vision of Lord Civan in the pose and attire as He was at Seekaazhi.

While Appar and Sambandhar were at Veezhimizhalai, cruel famine struck the people of that place and environs. Appar and Sambandhar, with their large retinue of devotees, were the greatest sufferers as they had a choice to go back to Seekaazhi but could not exercise the choice as Sambandhar had sent back the deputationists with a refusal. He knew, all-knowing as he was, that his stay was necessary to cheer the local people and to mitigate their suffering by his presence. The suffering of the local people was not a curse of God, for why should the all-loving God lay a curse on His people? It was the Law of Karma which with relentless logic was working itself out. Sambandhar, of course, had no Prarabda Karma, no Agami Karma, and least of all any Sanchita Karma. The Lord at Veezhimizhalai did not want Sambandhar, Appar and their retinue to suffer like the local people. So He decided to give them every day a famine-relief cash allowance. Let Sekkizhaar tell us the tale. He sings:

While Sambandhar slept that night
after adoring the rosy feet of Him
who was the space, the earth, the fire,
the soft breeze, the two orbs of light, and water as well,
the feet of Him who was his life-breath,

and the object of Experience in contemplation,
 the feet of Him who became all the worlds
 and stood beyond the worlds in a huge form,
 the feet of Him who carried a skeleton on His shoulders
 and danced in the woods,
 the feet of Him who loved to abide in ancient Mizhalai.
 He graciously appear before Sambandhar in his dreams.

* * *

And told him:

“Even though the evil, the cruel malady of hunger
 which has appeared as a phenomenon of nature
 will not affect you,
 in order to prevent it afflicting those
 who have adopted the Way of Life of Caivaism
 which is found in you,
 We have ordained for your sake
 for a gold coin apiece to appear on the ancient
 gem-set sacrificial altar
 on its eastern and western ends.
 When this season of famine ends,
 O Sambandha of immeasurable fame,
 this supply too will cease.”
 Thus the Sire of Thiruveezhi-mizhalai
 bestowed His grace on him.

* * *

On the Lord disappearing from his dream
 after bestowing grace on him,
 the young Lion of Senbai woke up,
 marvelled at the manner
 of the grace of the Lord,
 and when, accompanied by the king of the music of speech
 he was about to go clockwise
 round the gem of a temple of Veezhinaathar
 whose chest is hugged by a garland of fragrant Kondrai
 flowers,
 the child saw, by the grace of the Lord of the Dame,
 a golden coin on top of the altar of sacrifices
 which was on the side
 opposite to the westward direction he was taking.

* * *

Appar also found a coin. To continue:

With deep devotion, he adored the Lord,
 and took the coin,

and, standing with joined palms and welling love,
proclaimed by welcome beat of drum,
“Let all devotees dear to the Lord
come to eat a good feast.”
And to the devotees who responded to the invitation,
he served rice blessed by the Lord,
curries, ghee, milk and curd
to their hearts’ content.
While he spent his day thus in the great Thavam
of hospitality.

* * *

Noticing that in the holy charitable inn
of the King of Speech
the devotees ate their sanctified food precisely at mid-day,
the son of the Lord who rides on a bull
turned to those who cook the food in his camp
and addressed them thus:
“O you who are never a shelter for evil!
How does it happen
that you are not able to cook the sanctified food in time
and serve the food
to the large numbers of devotees who throng here?
Please explain to me!”

* * *

On the chief of the Vaidic Brahmanas
thus graciously admonishing them,
those who cook the food in the sacred Mutt replied:
“We are not able to understand this in any way.
What happens is that
When we take a coin received from Him who owns you
and go to the bazaar to buy whatever we need,
the shopkeepers say
that the coin should be exchanged
at the money-changers at a discount
for a current coin.
On the other hand the coin received
by the great sage Vaageesar,
they eagerly receive.
This is the reason for the delay.”

* * *

Thirugnana-sambandhar,
on hearing this, began to think;
“When the coin given to me by Lord Civan

has to be discounted,
 the fact that the other coin
 is welcome and not liable to discount,
 must be due to the fact
 that the other coin is earned by service
 rendered by Thirunavukkarasar of great integrity;
 therefore, I shall address the Great Lord in song,
 and pray that the coin paid to me in days to come
 is not liable to discount.
 Thus did think Sambandhar
 and made a resolve in his mind.

* * *

The next day,
 he entered the temple of the Lord
 and sang the decad beginning with the words,
 "Do graciously exempt my coin too from discount."
 When his men went to the Bazaar Street
 with the coin received after Sambandhar sang thus,
 and showed it to the vendors,
 they shouted with one voice,
 "O man of good Thavam!
 This coin is very good.
 Whatever you want, we shall gladly supply."
 From that day onwards,
 they served very enthusiastically the mid-day meal
 exactly at the hour of noon. 2468-570

* * *

Thus Sambandhar and Appar continued to feed the multitude of devotees till rain again fell on earth and food materials became plentiful.

Sekkizhaar does not explain in this context why Sambandhar should receive an ancient or foreign coin not used as current currency in the land, and why Appar, on the other hand, should receive coin locally in current circulation. In Appar's biography, however, Sekkizhaar raises this question and answers with this song:

"Since Sambandhar,
 who drank the sacred-breast milk
 of the Dame of the Himalayaas
 that the country might be redeemed,
 was the sacred son of the Lord of Mizhalai,
 he received the coin liable to be discounted.

But Appar, on account of his service
which took the form of labour with his own hands,
discountless coin, he continued to receive. 1525-260

* * *

From Thiruveezhimizhalai, Sambandhar and Appar travelled together to another 19 pilgrim centres and arrived at Thirumaraikkaadu, now called "Vedaaranyam"

Here occurred another famous incident in the lives of Sambandhar and Appar. The gates of the main entrance to the temple in Thirumaraikkaadu had remained closed, for God knows how long, and devotees were using a side entrance to enter the temple.

Whatever the reason for the closure of the main gates, Sambandhar and Appar would not go in by a side entrance. So Sambandhar requested Appar to sing a decad and open the gates. When even ten stanzas out of eleven had been sung and still the gates did not open, Appar with a sinking heart sang the last stanza. He sang:

"O Lord, You with Your big toe
stopped the attack on Kailasa
by the Rakshasa;
You have no pity;
O my Lord,
O Lord of Maraikkaadu
surrounded by Punnai trees
seeping honey-drops from their flowers,
do come and open this door quickly."

Appar vol. v. d. 10 st. 11.

* * *

Then the door opened.

Sambandhar and Appar entered the temple proudly through the main gate, and, on returning after worshipping the Lord, Appar, in his turn, requested Sambandhar to close the gates. No sooner had Sambandhar concluded the first of eleven stanzas of the decad, the door shut fast and secure. The stanza was:

'O Chivalrous Knight
 who abides in Maraikkaadu
 surrounded by sweet groves,
 whom the Four Vedas themselves
 adore and worship!
 Do graciously bestow Your grace quickly just now on me
 who am singing this decad
 with the object of closing this gate of Your temple.

Sambandhar Vol. II d. 37 st. 1.

* * *

Everyone rejoiced over the two incidents, but on return to the Mutt, Appar's mind was sore grieved that without understanding the will of the Lord, he had presumed to request the Lord to open the door quickly and had, besides, upbraided the Lord saying, "O, pitiless Lord," when the door failed to open even after the tenth stanza of the decad. People who pride themselves on their swift reading could easily make the mistake of imagining that Appar was jealous of Sambandhar's ability to shut the door by the end of the first stanza of his song. On the other hand, he blamed himself for wishing the door to open quickly. For, he now realised that he had presumed to have a desire apart from the Lord's desire. For, "God's will hath no why."

There is a more mundane reason for those who like such reasons. Doors shut fast for, God knows, how many centuries, will not open just for the singing of four lines of a stanza. God, wherever He can, avoids the creation of a sense of super-naturalness or supranaturalness to colour an act of His grace. This is the reason why people who call themselves 'Pahuththarivaalars', "men of common sense" are still in an exceedingly small minority. This is also the reason why, Anatole France said, "Chance is, perhaps, the pseudonym God prefers to use whenever He does not want to sign His name". "Coincidence" is another such word. God laughs in His sleeves when He hears the use of such words.

Sekkizhaar could not resist expatiating on the greatness of the act of these two devotees. He sings:

The work which the numberless crores of Vedas jointly did,
 these two devotees,
 who get rid of many difficulties which beset us,

all by themselves performed today.
 Who is capable of describing the greatness
 of the superior ones who adore the rosy feet
 of the Lord with matted locks
 (wherein is contained the river)
 who stood in the form of Naadam,
 the nucleus of all speech?

2489-591

* * *

Let us recall to mind that in the very first line of the Thiruvaachakam, Manikkavachakar sings:

"Hallowed be the feet of Naadan-
 the Lord of the form of the cosmic sound."

Let us also recall to mind that St. John begins his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, the same in the beginning was God." Sekkizhaar concluded that the similarity in prowess between Sambandhar and Appar on the one hand and the Vedas on the other hand is great indeed.

Thirunavukkarasar retired to his Mutt and went to sleep. The Lord appeared before him in his dreams and commanded thus: "We will be at Vaaimoor, come there!" When he had gone to Vaaimoor, Sambandhar happened to enquire where Appar was. On being told that he had gone to Vaaimoor, Sambandhar was puzzled why he should have gone there. Therefore, he followed Appar to Vaaimoor and after worshipping the Lord abiding there and after singing decades in His honour, both returned to Maraikkaadu.

'Why should the Lord command Appar to go to Vaaimoor to meet Him? Could it have been that the Lord wanted to tell him that he had fulfilled his mission which was to play the role of St. John the Baptist to Lord Jesus Christ. Appar himself is puzzled. He sings:

The Lord of Thiruvaaimoor
 where, wherever you look, coconuts grow,
 sought out the place where I was abiding,
 and, coming up to that place, identified Himself,
 and said: "Come to Thiruvaaimoor!"
 and graciously departed.
 For what purpose could it be?"

Vol. v. d. 50 st. 1.

* * *

Was it to tell him to leave Sambandhar free to carry out his mission, and to spend the rest of his life in pilgrimage to other shrines till the final call came to Him?

To Sambandhar and Appar thus staying at Thirumaraikaadu, came envoys sent by the Queen and the Chief Minister of Paandi-naadu. They fell at the feet of Sambandhar and described the sad and sordid state of the Vedic Religion in their country. They said, in short, that from the king downwards all except the Queen and the Chief Minister had turned into Jains, the King by erroneous conviction and the rest mostly on the principle of '*Yathā rājā, Tathā prajā*', 'As the King, so the people', a few perhaps by coercion and several by fear of persecution. These two too had to practise their Vedic religion secretly lest they should incur the displeasure of the king. Sambandhar heard them with sympathy, and, accompanied by Appar went to the temple, and after worshipping the Lord, came out, and, sitting under the main tower, informed Appar about his resolve to go to Thiruvaalayaai, present Madurai. The aged Appar, still bearing the indelible scars of the scourgings and other forms of torture by the Jain monks, was scared for the safety of the Child and tried to dissuade him from his resolve to go to Madurai. Sekkizhaar records:

Arasu said out of his concern,
"Dear Son!
There is no limit to the perfidy
of those wretched Jains;
I have something more to say:
the planetary aspects too are malevolent;
it is not proper for you
to agree to go there."

* * *

Sambandhar replied:
"If it is true that the object we worship
is the feet of our Lord,
no harm will approach us!"
Saying so, he contemplated
the fragrant blossoms—
the rosy feet of the Transcendent Being—
and expounded his credo
by the decad beginning with the words,
"The Partner of Het
with shoulders smooth like the bamboo."

He sang:

Since the Partner of Her
with shoulders smooth like the bamboo,
He with the throat which swallowed the poison,
He who plays the Veena
and wears on His crown
the flawless moon and the Ganges,
since He has taken abode in my heart,
the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury,
Jupiter, Venus, Saturn,
and the two snakes (Rahu and Ketu);
they all are unqualifiedly good, good indeed,
wholly good are they to the devotees,
exceedingly good they are!

* * *

Since He, Lord Civan,
with bones, the boar's tusk,
and the tortoise shell dangling on His chest,
astride the bull along with His Consort,
and adorned with the golden garland
of Datura flowers and the Ganges,
since He has taken abode in my heart
Aayilyam, the ninth star from Asvini, the first,
Makam, the ninth plus one,
Visaakam, the ninth plus seven,
Kettai, the eighteenth,
Thiruvaathirai, the sixth,
and associated ones, namely,
Bharani, Kaarththikai, Pooram, Chiththirai,
Swaati, Pooraadam, Poorattaathi,
all these are lovingly good,
good indeed, very good,
exceedingly good to the devotees of Civan.

Vol. 2. d. 85, st. 1 and 2.

* * *

The other nine stanzas are not relevant to our immediate context. Thirunavukkarasar was not only convinced that no harm would come to Sambandhar, but began to set out for Madurai even in advance of Sambandhar. But, on Sambandhar, with joined palms and pleading words, forbidding him to do so, and on the other hand, begging him to stay in Colanaadu, Appar agreed to do so.

It is forbidden to discuss or talk of any matter in the premises of a temple, other than such affairs relating to the worship of God,

but it was permissible to discuss such a matter as the present one with Appar under the roof of the outermost tower of a temple, which was a place neither within the precincts of a temple nor totally outside it. Nor did this particular visit have any other object. This is made clear by the next stanza which reads like this:

In order to cherish and nourish the Vedas,
and in order to make clear what Caivaism is,
Sambandhar once again entered the temple
and with the feet of the Lord touching his head,
he prostrated before the Rare Gem of Maraikkaadu,
and rising up,
he sang, adored, praised the Lord,
obtained the Lord's blessings on his venture,
took leave of Him,
came out of the temple,
paid his respects to Appar, the King of Speech,
in a manner that he could not refuse his consent,
gave him leave to continue his own tour,
embraced him with loyal love,
departed with reluctance,
and went towards the radiant palanquin,
thus did he of the town of Kaazhi. 2516-618.

* * *

Thus, while Appar stayed behind, Sambandhar proceeded rapidly towards Madurai, and arrived there passing through six shrines of the Lord, the last of which was Kodungkundram now called Piraanmalai, the first town of Paandinaadu he set his feet in on his visit to Madurai. It is 67 kilometres to the north-east of Madurai. In all these six shrines he did not fail to pay due homage in spite of his eagerness to reach Madurai as soon as possible.

Finally,

Worshipping Lord Civan,
the Hill of the hue of ripe coral,
Him, who skinned the hide of an attacking elephant,
Him who abode sweetly
at the Hill of Curved Top — Kodungkundram,
Sambandhar sang rare Tamil songs,
crossed high hills, now called Azhagarmalai,
extensive forests, fertile countryside,
and arrived at Madurai the ancient city
with tall ramparts which touched the moon. 2528-630

* * *

We shall now describe the evil omens, oppressive nightmares and other horrible forebodings and fears which assailed the Jain monks on the arrival of Sambandhar in this manner.

On top of their temples,
On top of the nearby caves
where the Jain monks dwelt,
on top of the Asoka tree of bright flowers,
on top of the refectories where the monks
ate their morsels of food out of their cupped hands,
buzzards and barn-owls,
and evil-omen-spelling birds of various kinds,
quarrelled with one another
and portended calamities to come.

2530-632

* * *

Switches of peacock feathers, rafia-seats, rolls of mats
fell from the hands which held them;
feet staggered, the left eyes twiched;
but one and all the Jains could not see any reason
for the forthcoming ruin,
and lost their reason,
and felt confused and confounded.

2531-633

* * *

Similar ill-omens and signs of forebodings of evil occurred in all the places throughout Paandinaadu where dwelt the Jains. Therefore, the Jains converged on Madurai and joining with the local inhabitants, all of them conveyed the information to the King and related to one another, "Such and such dreams we saw." Sekki-zhaar concludes the string of stanzas with the wail of despair of those who heard these news:

"What is going to happen, O sinners?
This series of dreams, it is certain,
are bound to cause preordained harm
to the monks."

Saying thus, they became men of grieving heart,
and would not take their only meal at midday,
and asking themselves, "What are we to do?"
became prey to worries and sank into despair.
Thus responded those who heard the tales of woe.

2539-641

* * *

Wherēas all those people were reduced to that state,
 good omens galore greeted
 Pandiyan King's great Consort—
 of youthful and delicate gait
 of a great peacock
 and a lower abdomen like the spread-out hood
 of a snake—
 and the Chief Minister of righteous way of life.

2540-642

* * *

Of this Chief Minister, Kulachchiraiyar by name, Sekkizhaar sings:

Manamerkudi,
 in the good country of Paandinaadu
 of oft-spoken ancient glory,
 reputed for its ever-lasting munificence,
 was surrounded by an adjoining belt
 of paddy fields
 abounding in crops of red-tinted paddy,
 and farms of sugarcane
 bordered by rows of Kamuku trees.

* * *

The Chief of that town
 was Kulachchiraiyar of ineffable excellence—
 whom Vanthondar described
 as "matchless great Nambi",—
 a man who, by his strength of character,
 never failed in his commitment
 to noble service to the servitors of the Lord.

* * *

Just for the reason that they were
 devotees to the Lord with an eye on the forehead,
 he would rejoice greatly,
 fall prostrate at their feet with welling love,
 pay obeisance to them with palms
 joined together like a flower-bud,
 and address them in appropriate warm-hearted,
 sincere words. 1695, 1696—1, 2.

* * *

The words in the original for the last line in the above stanza is 'ecra-nun-mozhi'. Here is an instance of "Applied Thirukkural". Thiruvalluvar defined 'Sweet Words' thus in the first Kural of the chapter with that title:

"Sweet words are those which,
suffused with love and free from guile,
issue from the mouths of men
who have apprehended Reality."

* * *

Thiruvalluvar's words "suffused with love and free from guile" are "eepam alaiyee, padiru-ilavaam". Sekkizhar uses the same word—eepam—for "suffused with love.., and the positive word 'nal'—good—in place of the negative expression 'free from guile'. It is interesting to note that the International Thesaurus gives the word 'good' as a synonym for 'sincere.'

To resume Sekkizhaar's account. He continues:

Noted he was for his practice
of humbly paying obeisance with all his heart
to anyone
whether he was a person
of one of the ordained castes
or one who was beyond the pale
of the legitimate castes,
provided he found him to be a devotee
at heart to Sankaran.

* * *

He was noted for prostrating on the ground
and adoring anyone
if he was a devotee of the Lord
with the matted locks
atop which the crescent moon shines,
no matter he was a person of good qualities
which the world accepts
or a person of limitless evil qualities.

* * *

Whether such worthy men came in large numbers
or only one single person seeking food,
moved by love nurtured manifold by constant meditation,
going forward and receiving them,
he fed them with great hospitality.

* * *

He was noted for the characteristic
of daily worshipping the feet
of those who displayed on their bodies
the sacred ash, loin cloth,
and rosary of rudraaksha beads
and who repeated with disciplined tongue
the Mystic Five Letters of the Primordial Lord—
A man of such righteous conduct he was.
He was the head
of the eminent band of counsellors
to Nedumaarar, the Southerner
of unbounded fame.

1695 to 1702—1 to 8

* * *

Simultaneously with the appearance of the good omens,
the Queen and the Chief Minister heard the news of the arrival of
Sambandhar from people delighted to be the bearers of the good
news. The Queen rewarded them generously and sent them away.

Then summoning the Chief Minister, she bade him go forward
and receive Sambandhar with the words, "We are redeemed by your
arrival." The Minister bowed down to the Queen and hurried
away, saying to himself, "This spells good to the King also," and
went outside the gates of Madurai to meet the Child Saint who
bestowed the Tamil Veda on mankind. While he was thus engaged,
the Queen, who resembled Lakshmi seated on the lotus flower,
informed the King that she should go to worship the Lord abiding
in Aalavaai, went out with a special body-guard and surrounded by
her usual retinue as well, worshipped the Lord at the temple, and
she too stood ready to welcome the Child Saint.

Numerous are the stanzas in which Sekkizhaar describes
the triumphant progress of Sambandhar in his palanquin and
his retinue which increased minute by minute, metre
by metre. When the joyous clamour of the people entered the
ears of Kulachchiraiyar, the Chief Minister, he exulted with joy.

With joined palms held above his head
he rapidly went forward.
The ardour filling his heart
went ahead of him,
and saw the sea of devotees of great Thavam
accompanying the Sacred Son of Him
who has stored up the poison in His throat,
Forthwith, the Minister-in-Chief
of the Paandiyan King
fell flat on the ancient ground
and paid his humble obeisance
that Tamilnadu might prosper.

* * *

Servitors of long-standing great Thavam,
many of them went forward,
and paid obeisance to Kulachchiraiyar
who had prostrated down on the ground;
but noticing that he did not rise from the ground,
they went and saluted the feet
of the Vaidic Chief of Pukali
where Brahma on the lotus worships the Lord
and pronounced that he who has come there
was Kulachchiraiyar,
the Minister of the Southerner.

* * *

The darling of Cirapuram,
on hearing those words,
the lotus — his face — abloom with delight,
alighted from the palanquin of pearls
which radiated light all around,
hurried forward,
took hold of him with his lotus-like hands,
lifted him up,
and while he stood before him with folded palms,
the Munificent One (of Puhali)
looked at him
who had earned the right to a boon by his Thavam
and gave his sweet words of promise.

* * *

"To the blessed daughter of the Cola King
 and to you of perfect intent,
 the chance of the holy grace of our Lord,
 swelling up is very good indeed!"
 On his saying so,
 the Minister adorned with a garland of fragrant flowers
 prostrated humbly on the ground
 and worshipped him,
 and related the present state of affairs
 to him whom he considered as the fruit of his great Thavam.

* * *

The faultless quality of our Thavam,
 and the glory of the future,
 are evidenced by the blessing
 of your graciously coming here today.
 Thus, we have the sacred grace of God with us
 for ever and ever.
 The country sunk in a way of life devoid of good,
 and our King of good Tamil stock,
 both redeemed will be;
 moreover, we have gained the glory
 of bodies shining once again
 in the glow of the sacred ash to victory restored—
 thus he spoke.

* * *

Hearing the proud news
 of your graciously going over here,
 and regarding it
 as inachievable great blessing,
 Mangayarkarasiyar sincerely believes
 that our good times have come in your person,
 and graciously bade me thus:
 "Go forward there and worship his feet."
 Saying so, he worshipped Sambandhar,
 and with swelling joy worshipped again
 and adored him—
 thus did the Minister of the munificent King.

2553 to 2558—635 to 660

* * *

Thirugnanasambandhar said comforting words to the Minister
 and enquired whereabouts was Aalavaai, the temple in Madurai.

The Minister pointed out the soaring tower of the temple and added that it was the Aalavaai the Child Saint enquired about.

On his doing so, the Child saint with joined palms held over his head prostrated on the ground at the very spot he stood in, and sang a decad full of significant words. This is the first stanza of that song:

Ah, this is the Aalavaai, the temple
where abides with the Dame of beautiful eyes,
the Lord of the form of a roaring pillar of fire,
the Chief of all the host of ghouls,
He who graciously bestowed on the world
the vast Four Vedas,
and all the objects found in the world,
He who is served and adored by
Mangayarkarasi, daughter of the Cola King,
a lady of honour,
one who well realised
that what she had so far learnt
is no more than a handful of sand
and that what she has not yet learnt
was of the size of the universe,
the Rich Dame Lakshmi dwelling on a lotus,
and the Consort-in-Chief of the Paandian.

Vol. III d. 120. St. 1

* * *

Thirugnanasambandhar sang ecstatically many more stanzas and decads. Mentioning one of them, Sekkizhaar refers to the Lord abiding in Aalavaai as 'The President of the First Academy of Tamil Literature.' It is such phrases which makes a Tamizhan hold up his head proudly in Tamilnadu of even today when there are people who speak derisively of this noble language coeval in time if not earlier to all other languages in the world, and which has the unique distinction of possessing the one book, Thirukkural, which within its 1,330 couplets of 2,660 lines and 7,310 feet contains all the teaching a man requires to live in this world as he ought to live and to gain Mukti as well.

* * *

When Thirugnanasambandhar had sung one more decad, and, leaving the presence of the Lord, was on his way

out to the sacred courtyard, the Dame of eyes bathed in devotion-filled tears who too had come to receive the Child Saint, but had moved out of His way to one side when she saw him arrive and straightway enter the Lord's presence, now came forward to meet him. The Minister who stood nearby, fell at the feet of the Child, and introduced the Queen saying: "She here who stands with joined palms raised over the luxurious growth of black hair on her head is the daughter of the ColaKing of the country where elephants with huge trunks live." On his saying so, the Child Saint hurried forward to meet her. The Consort-in-Chief of the Southerner prostrated on the ground, her head touching the golden lotus-like rosy feet of the calf of Lord Civan. And the Native of eternal Senbai conferred on her a pleasurable and great honour of raising her up with his sacred hands, which honour the Munificent Lord was pleased to graciously show her. It was Lord Civan who wished to bestow the honour, and Sambandhar was the person, whom the Lord chose to carry out His will.

Rising up and standing before him
 who had fed on gnosis,
 Maaniyaar of good Thavam,
 deeming that what she had in mind
 had been achieved,
 with her blue lotus-like eyes brimming with tears,
 and her coral-like red lips
 seized by a stammer,

exclaimed:

"How great is the Thavam
 performed by me and my husband!"

2570-672

* * *

Having graciously given leave for the Queen to depart, Sambandhar wended his way amidst a jostling crowd of rejoicing devotees to the Mutt assigned by the happy Minister and settled down there with his retinue.

The Jain monks who move about stealthily like ghosts in the night had watched during the day the arrival of the Great Exponent of the Vedas and became perturbed in their minds. Now they gathered in a place making the darkness of the night pale before the darkness of their hearts. The monks who gathered there, unable

to bear to hear the singing of the sacred decads by the retinue of Sambandhar, decided to inform the King of the goings-on in the city, went up to the palace gates and addressed the guards to announce their arrival to the King. On receiving the message, the King sent for them and they reached the audience-hall in a greatly agitated state.

Of this King, Sekkizhaar sings ten stanzas of which the first stanza only is relevant for our purpose.

Sekkizhaar sings:

Caught in the net of the Jains
 who led their life torturing their bodies
 mistaking a misleading way of life of ascetism,
 he sought sanctuary
 at the Karma-metamorphising anklet-girt feet
 of the Adept in Tamil
 that he might be freed from the next. 4007-1

The King asked them the reason for their coming in a crowd and they answered:

"Unmentionable evil has come upon us!"

They related the arrival of Sambandhar and his retinue. The king asked them who those people were. When they answered that Sambandhar has arrived to defeat them in a polemic discussion, the King flew into a rage on hearing the name of Thirugnana-sambandhar. He asked them what should be done and they replied:

"The Brahmana who has come,
 let us not think of driving him away by force.
 In the Mutt where that young Brahmana is camped,
 if we perform black magic rites
 for a fire to flare up,
 he would not stay in this City
 but go away".

2586-688.

* * *

"If this is the only way, go and do it", thus having issued his command he sought his bedroom with a heavy heart and took to his bed. The Queen arrived at that moment. On the King not speaking to her, she asked him for the reason. He answered:

"He of Kazhumalam of glory, having received the grace of Lord Sankaran, has arrived here to win against our monks in a polemical debate. The monks have seen him and his large retinue of devotees who smear themselves with white ash, and I have heard about it. The reasons for my being in my bed-room is just that, and nothing else."

Hearing the King say thus, Mangayarkarasiyar said:

"If this is all the problem,
if he with age-old divine qualities debated here,
joining the winners and supporting them
will be to your good. Do not worry about it."

* * *

She left with a delighted heart, and met Kulachchiraiyaar on the way and related to him what she had heard from the King. The Minister agreed with her that they had received a great blessing that day but ended by saying, "We do not know the perfidious acts which the Jains will do." The Queen shared his misgivings; she agreed with him that the Jains were capable of any evil, and concluded by saying:

"To Gnaana-sambandhar,
if instead of good, harm should befall,
we will put an end to our lives."

* * *

Meanwhile the Jains with intent to set fire to it, approached the Mutt where he who had come to propagate the "Caiva Faith" was staying. Could other incantations ever approach the direction in which those who chant the Letters Five, the Primeval Mantra, live? The Jain monks lost heart when their Mantras proved ineffective, and the vile persons joined together and realised that if the King heard about this, he would no longer believe in the superiority of their religion, and that they would lose their living. So like engulfing darkness they went to the outside of the Mutt carrying an object of latent fire like a piece of phosphorus, and performed their vile deed—the men of perfidious mind

On the dark deed done by those men manifesting itself openly, the retinue of Sambandhar grew alarmed and agitated in mind,

but soon put out the fire, and, convinced that this was the deed of the Jains, went up to Sambandhar. When they informed him of the destardly deed of the Jains, he exclaimed with concern in his voice. "What! Destroy the exterior of the holy Mutt where men of great Thavam sleep? Ah! Wretched sinners!" Exclaiming, "Though this is an evil directed against me, would it be justifiable if it affects the devotees of God too." With fear and fury rising in turn, the Adept in the three branches of Tamil literature concluded in his mind that "The true manner of the King guarding his subjects has slipped up in this instance." Sekkizhaar wound up this incident thus. Sambandhar said to himself:

"It is the law
that the final responsibility
for this cruel deed
lies with the King," and sang the decad
beginning with the words,
"Ayyane! Thiruvaalavai meviya-aiyane!"
In this decad, he commanded thus.
"Let the flames of the fire
set by the Jains to the Mutt where the Caivars live
go slowly and attack the Paandiyan!" 2602-704.

* * *

Straightway, the Paandiyan was seized with a burning sensation all over his body as if his clothes had caught fire. By this time it was dawn.

The Queen and the Ministers on hearing about the fire set to the Mutt thought that they who invited the Child Saint to Madurai deserved to die. On visiting the Mutt, they were glad to learn that no harm had befallen the saint, but soon became victims to dire fear when they learned from the uniformed personal guards of the King that the heat had reached the King.

The heat was such that those who neared the King had to step far back at once, and that tender plantain leaves laid on the body of the King to cool him became shrivelled at once by the intense heat. All efforts of the doctors to relieve the suffering of the king failed miserably.

The Jains hearing about this calamity, feared that it was, perhaps, on account of their dirty deed of the previous night, and

approached the king, skilfully hiding their shame. When they tried their Mantras on the King and attempted to stroke him with their whisks of peacock feathers, the whisks burnt off to black cinder. When they sprinkled on the King's body water from their pots, the burning increased manyfold as if ghee had been poured over a fire. When this happened, the King turned on those around him and angrily bade them leave his bedside.

The Queen and the Minister were convinced that the suffering of the King was the direct fruit of the fearsome fire set by the Jains to the Mutt where Sambandhar was put up, and decided that the remedy for this evil lay only in the grace of the Child Saint. They concluded that if he who received gnosis from the Lord adorned by a chaplet on His head would but graciously cast his eyes on the frame of the King's body, not only would this disease cease, but the disease of birth itself would cease.

When these two persons offered their honest impression to the King, on the mere hearing the name of Gnanasambandhar the King felt his weariness leave him.

Turning towards the Jains who surrounded him, and suspecting that his suffering was due to the villainy of these men, he told them, "If the great Vaidic young lad of the eternal Caiva Faith came, and by his grace, this suffering ceased, then my suspicion would be confirmed."

Immediately, the Queen and the Minister sped to the Mutt. The Minister requested the attendant devotees to announce to the Child Saint their arrival. On their doing so, Sambandhar asked the attendants to invite them to come in. Forthwith they entered his presence.

Both of them fell at his feet and clung to them, and related their woes with faltering voice and tear-streaming eyes.

When they said thus,
the Prince of beautiful Pukali said:
"You need not have any fear;
Against the senseless Jains,
to your delight,
and in the presence of everyone,
I shall win in a polemic debate
and shall adorn the King,

the emblem of whose flag is the fish,
with the sacred ash ritualistically.

2652-734.

* * *

On their requesting him to hurry and ascend his palanquin
and set out to the palace, he said:

Success and failure are His doings;
For the purpose of the removal of the pollution
of seeing and speaking to those sinners, the Jains,
and for you to win in your objectives,
I shall ascertain the holy will of the Lord
who has a flag with a bull as an emblem.
Saying so, the Patron of Senbai
surrounded by flowers-in-bloom groves
set out on his palanquin..

* * *

The Munificent One,
who came to redeem the world,
set out, borne on the flood of devotees,
whose bodies were smeared all over with the ash,
and,
with joined palms raised over his head,
and with his eyes reflecting their delight,
entered Thiruvaalavaai
where abides eternally
the Lord with the russet locks.

* * *

"To meet persons
whom it is not meet to meet,
and do debate with them,
O Lord of the hue of a flame of fire,
is this Your sacred will?"
Thus Paalarraavaayar—
the fruit of numberless good fortunes of our land—
facing the Reality,
began to sing a decad—
a garland strung with words
of versatile Tamil.

* * *

Singing firstly the decad
beginning with the words,
"The forest-dwelling beast's hide"
and looking forward to the sacred will

of Him Who wears a garland of Kondrai flowers,
 he followed with the flawless decad
 beginning with the words, "Veda-Velvi",
 a sweet garland of words,
 in which he sang his plea
 for victory in debate over and destruction of
 the shameless Jains.

* * *

The poison verily as nectar You ate,
 and the nectar to the heavenly ones You gave;
 Time the Reaper, the Lord of Death,
 You punished on account of Maarkandeyan;
 on my behalf, today, all the world over,
 Your fame should spread;
 O Perfection of Righteous Conduct,
 Whom the Four Vedas adore;
 O Aalavaai-abiding Lord Civan!

2634 to 2638—736 to 740

* * *

Thus he prayed.

Receiving the blessing of God, Sambandhar came out to the first gate of the temple and got into his palanquin amidst the boisterous rejoicings of his retinue. Thus he went along, with the Queen following him on her palanquin, and the Minister accompanied by a large band of devotees preceding him, and entered the palace of the Paandiyan king. The Minister went before the King and announced the arrival of Sambandhar, and the King, his former suffering becoming a little relieved on the mere hearing of the news, got enough strength to command the Minister to place a golden seat beside the head of his bed.

Furthermore, the King bade the Minister go forward and receive Sambandhar. The Jains who stood by, on hearing this, exclaimed, "Is this the way you would sustain our religion?" They continued, "Well, you have invited him here; but if you would defend your own religion, then tell both of us to rid you of your suffering, and, even if he alone happens to get rid of your illness, please be pleased to say that we too got rid of the ailment." The King refused to do so and said, "Well, both of you do your best to rid me of this misery."

By the time he had finished saying so to the discomfiture and ruin of the plans of the Jains, Sambandhar arrived at the front gates of the palace and, stepping down from his palanquin, entered the palace.

With Kulachchiraiyar going in front of him,
the Consort of the King too
stepped down to the ground
and went along.

The King of the country
where prevailed Tamil,
cool like the spring-waters,
saw the Kauniyar
who seemed to him
a full moon descended from heaven
on to the earth
in order to disperse the long-drawn darkness.

2650-752.

*

*

*

The King, a little relieved of his burning fever by the very sight of the sacred form of the Child Saint, courteously enquired of him where he hailed from. To this query, Sambandhar replied that he hailed from Kazhumalam and followed up his answer with a decad which gave in detail the twelve names which his city bore.

While Sambandhar was seated on the golden seat set with gems, the Jains hid their fears, and, surrounding him like the dark clouds which surround the rising sun, jerked at him texts from their scriptures, their eyes aflame with anger.

Hearing which, the Child Saint said: "Tell me the principles of your religion exactly as they are." On hearing these soft words several of them began shouting at the same time very excitedly. The bejewelled Lady seeing this, and, unable to stand it, shook inwardly with concern for the Child Saint, and

Looking at the Southerner,
she said,
"So far as his sacred body is concerned,
that this Child of the sweet grace of God,
seems a weakling,
these men here have hot thought of.

O King; your delirium, our magnanimous One
will help to end.
Later on, if these excited Jains could argue,
let them speak.

* * *

The King, looking at her, said:
“Grieve not!”

(Then turning to the Jains he said:)
“What need for further discussion is there?”
Prove in my person, O you Jains,
and he here, the devotee
to the Lord with the matted locks
adorned by a river,
by getting rid of the heat
tormenting my body”.

* * *

He who partook of the nectar of gnosis,
looking at the Lakshmi of good Thavam, said:
“O Dame with eyes resembling those of a fawn,
listen!

Considering me a child,
You need not fear even the least.”

Saying so,
he sang a decad beginning thus:
“To the Jains of no certainty of faith,
I am not any weak opponent.”

* * *

To the Jains
surrounding the Child Saint,
and to the Child Saint—
who, by the strength of his standing
with the Lord,
graciously spoke the above words,—
to both of them the King of the South said:
“Do each of you severally fight
against the disease which has afflicted me today
and get rid of it.
Whoever puts a lasting end to it
is the winner in the debate.”

* * *

Hearing the words of the King,
the Jains dirty in mind as in their bodies,
looked at the Lord of the South
and said:

"We shall, by the assistance of God,
firstly pronounce our incantation
and get rid of the disease
from the left side of your body.

* * *



Those persons who did not know anything
went close to the King like enveloping darkness,
and, with intent to relieve the left side
of the King
of its fiery burning heat,
began caressingly rubbing the parts
with their whisks of peacock feathers.
The more they did so, the more the heat grew,
and the King, unable to bear the heat,

turned and looked at him
who hailed from Cirapuram. 2656 to 2661-758 to 763

* * *

Understanding the intention of the Southerner,
the Favourite of the Lord of Thirukazhumalam,
deciding that the sacred ash
of the Lord of Aalavaai,
serving as incantations and medicine,
shall get rid of the burning heat
of the right side of the King,
sang a sacred decad
which spoke of the merits of the sacred ash
praised by the sacred Vedas.

* * *

Taking the ash which spells growth
of spiritual prosperity,
he applied it with his hands
on the body of the King,
Immediately the unconquerable heat
left the King's body
which became cooler
than the cool waters of a tank.
On the other hand
on the already affected left side,
the heat grew worse;
and like a raging fire
the heat of both sides joined together
and raged so fiercely
that the area could no longer withstand it.

* * *

The Jains trembled with fear;
their feather-abounding whisks
turned to cinders;
the heat affecting the Southerner
began to scorch them as well,
Their already sooty bodies turned darker still;
they left the side of the King
and stood afar;
thus stood they,
who belonged to the senseless Creed,
posing as sensible men.

* * *

On the Prince of Puhali
 worshipped by many,
 reducing the heat on one side
 of the body of the King,
 men of surpassing intelligence in the world,
 came, and, astounded and astonished,
 surrounded the King.
 Meanwhile, it seemed
 as if the coolness and heat of this ancient world
 sought refuge
 on the right and left side respectively
 of the body of the King
 expert in wielding the lance.

* * *

The King claimed;
 "How amazing it is!
 In one and the same time,
 horrid hell is on one side of me,
 and the bliss of deliverance is on the other side;
 virulent poison is one side,
 while sweet-tasting nectar is on the other side;
 in the single frame of my body
 I am experiencing the nature of both.

* * *

He continued:

"O Jains of cruel craft!
 Defeated you are!
 Go away from me!
 O Munificent One of Vaidic caste
 who have come to redeem me,
 do graciously confer on me the grace
 of this heat leaving me completely!"
 Worshipping Sambandhar with his mind,
 thus said he,
 who thereby came closer to the path
 leading to Mukti.

* * *

His sacred face showing compassion,
 his holy hand holding forth the sacred ash,
 the Child Saint praised the Lord
 in words which paid homage to the
 great Vedas,

and, once more, applied it on the body;
 forthwith the heat deserted the body;
 The disease which was so far afflicting
 one side still
 now departed,
 and the King became completely well.

2662 to 2668—764 to 770.

* * *

The first two stanzas of the decad which Sambandhar sang on the occasion were:

Mantra, that which becomes, is Neerru
 (the sacred ash);
 on the bodies of the heavenly ones is Neerru!
 Beautiful, that which turns out to be, is Neerru;
 that which is adored is Neerru!
 Tantric power, that which is, is Neerru,
 In the religion, that which is contained, is Neerru!
 The red-coral-lips-possessing Uma's Partner,
 He of Thiruvaalavaai,
 His Neerru indeed is all these.

* * *

What in the Vedas is said, is Neerru!
 that which relieves grievous grief is Neerru!
 That which confers gnosis is Neerru!
 shortcomings, that which gets rid of, is Neerru!
 That which everyone talks about is Neerru!
 Content of the Reality is Neerru!
 He of Thiruvaalavaai
 surrounded by fields and cool waters,
 His Neerru indeed is all these. Vol. II.d. 66, st. 1 & 2

* * *

The Queen and the Chief Minister gratefully fell at the feet of Sambandhar, and the King, totally rid of the heat on his body, was overwhelmed with joy and acknowledged that he was redeemed from his sufferings by him who, in the presence of the shameless Jains, voluntarily came to relieve him of his ailment.

The Jain monks who had seen a mere decad of words cure the King of his ailment, and had also heard the King's frank acknowledgement of his indebtedness to the Child Saint, felt that there was

nothing to gain by any polemical discussion, and agreed between themselves that they should try for victory through ordeal by fire or water.

When the Child Saint also asked, "Well, speak out the truths of your faith", they replied that no purpose would be served by questions and answers, but that it was desirable to establish the truths of their respective creeds by an ocular demonstration. When the King heard these words, he tauntingly said, "You failed to rid me of the disease which afflicted me; what cheek you have to talk of a debate!" Deliberately misconstruing those words as a genuine question, they replied, "Let him and us respectively write down the principles of our creeds on palm leaves and throw them on a fire. That party whose palm leaf is not burnt by the fire is the victor."

Before the King could reply, the Child Saint addressing the Jain monks, said: "Let it be so, come before the King and perform the test." The King promptly ordered his servants to light a fire in his presence. The fire was lit accordingly.

Thirugnaana-sambandhar did not write anything new for this occasion. When the smoke had cleared and the fire was burning brightly, he called for the roll of palm leaves on which his maternal uncle had inscribed on the spot the decades sung by the Child Saint at shrine after shrine, and untied the roll, and selected a decad sung long ago at Thirunallaarru, the 99th shrine he visited during his fifth tour of pilgrimage centres. Madurai was the 146th shrine in the same tour. Nearly fifty shrines ago, and by time, nearly not less than a year ago, he had sung this decad.

* * *

The opening stanza of that decad is:

The Lord, the Transcendent Being,
the Owner of the fiery bull,
He who hugged
close to His golden-coloured broad chest
the Dame of bejewelled voluptuous breasts,
He Who has a pelt flung across His chest,
where He our great Lord abides
is none other than Nallaarru.

Vol. I. d. 47. st. 1

* * *

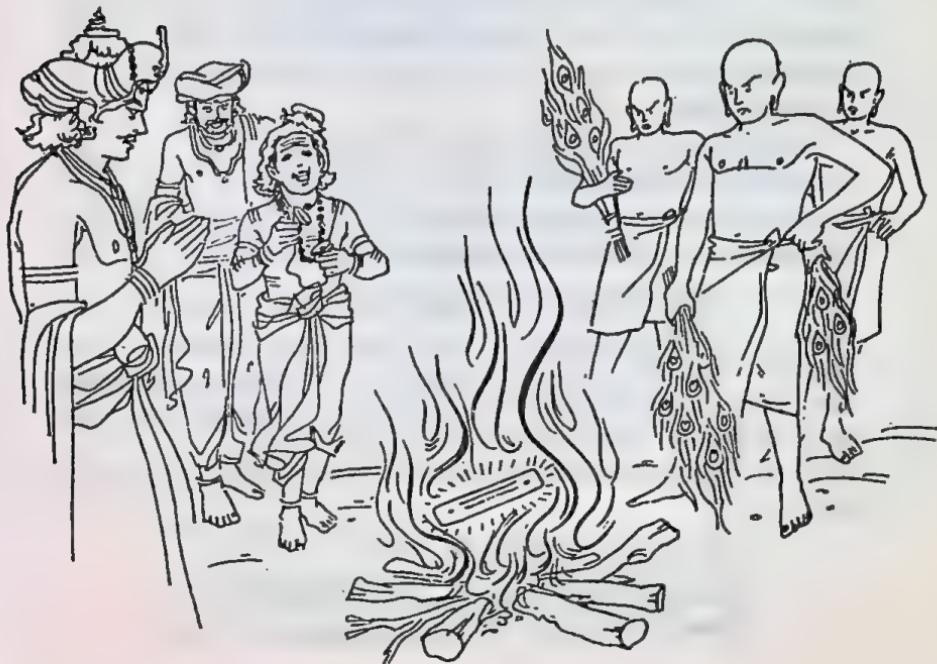
Thirugnaana-sambandhar then flung the palm-leaves on which the decad headed by the above poem was inscribed into the fire to the accompaniment of the chant of a decad beginning with the following stanza:

Since the Lord is depicted
 (in the opening stanza of the decad
 inscribed on the palm-leaves
 I am flinging into the fire)
 as embracing the cool buxom breasts of youthful bloom
 of the Mountain Maid
 Who is resplendent with a beauty
 which matched the growing glow
 of a tender leaf-shoot,
 if I fling these palm-leaves
 which carry on them the Name of the Lord
 of cool youthful live lustre
 who abides in Nallaarru,
 on this steadily shooting up simmering fire,
 no harm will come to them;
 this is nothing but the truth.

Vol. III. d. 87. st. I

* * *

The palm-leaves glowed in the glowing fire as green as ever before.



Since the song said that the Partner of the Mountain-Maid is the Reality, it glowed in the glowing flames as green as ever before.

The Jains who were about to drop into the fire the palm leaf inscribed with their creed, were seized by the fear whether it would survive the fire. Therefore, trembling in their bodies, they dropped the leaf into the fire. It is needless to say that it was burnt to cinders in no time.

When the King and others noted that the leaf dropped by the Child Saint remained unburnt during the agreed period of time, it was taken out and was found to be more green than ever before.

The King, watching the rescued leaf being strung in its place in the roll of decades, turned angrily at the Jains and ordered them to show him their leaf. When they approached the fire to take out the leaf, the fire fiercely roared aloft. The King ordered it to be put out with the aid of water. The Jains saw nothing left of the leaf but black cinder.

The King turned on the Jains with jeering laughter and said, "Go away from my presence, you who try to establish falsehood as truth." He added, "You lost that time when I was seized by the burning fever, now too; the leaf dropped into the fire has been destroyed beyond recognition. I suppose, you are not yet defeated, O mighty men!"

They refused to understand the meaning behind the words of the King, and said, "Well, we have lost in two tests, but even if we could gain victory in one chance out of three, we would have established the truth of our claims."

Even after the King had rejected their request, when the Child Saint asked, "Have you any further manner of debate?" they grasped at the opportunity and said, "Let us write on palm leaves our respective creeds and drop the leaves in running water. The party whose leaf goes down-stream is the defeated one, and the party whose leaf goes up-stream against the current is the victorious one."

"On the Jains saying so,
the Chieftain of Pukali of ever rising glory
graciously said: "Well, we will do this too."
Then, the Minister of victorious spear

came near him and said:
 "We should do this additional test
 only after knowing what those
 who fail in this test as well
 will do subsequently."

2695-797.

* * *

The Jains who stood there
 listening to these words,
 went up to him,
 with boiling rage mounting up,
 and, their speech slipping up
 on account of jealousy,
 themselves said:

"If we lose in this unique test,
 this king here shall impale us on the stakes." 2696-798

* * *

On hearing the words said by them,
 the King of the Malaya Hills said:
 "You have spoken in anger;
 you have forgotten your deeds.
 however, come along to drop in River Vaigai in floods
 the palm leaves inscribed
 with your respective creeds." 2697-799.

* * *

The Child Saint descended from his seat and ascended the palanquin and went ahead. Behind that munificent person the King followed on his horse, and the Jains devoid of the sense of knowing truth as it is, rode on their delusions. All the way along, men, women and children thronged both sides of the streets and sang the praises of Sambandhar, and decried the folly of the Jains.

Sambandhar reached the bank of Vaigai while the King accompanied by his Queen followed behind, and the Jains of vile conduct came by another path. The river was racing towards the sea.

On arriving near the fastly running waters
 of the river,
 the King commanded:
 "Let the child of great wisdom
 and of body shining with the sacred ash,
 and you Jains of different appearance,
 throw into the waters

the palm scrolls decided upon.
 Saying to themselves,
 "The losers will not be losers forever",
 the Jains took courage
 to take precedence.

2711-813

* * *

Since they did not have knowledge of the truth,
 like chaff in paddy,
 the Jains who had nothing inside their mind,
 and who deny the True Being,
 wrote on their palm-leaf
 "It is, It is not."
 Looked at the rushing waters of the river,
 and moved by desire,
 they threw into the waters
 the palm-leaf in their hand.
 On their throwing it in,
 it hastily rushed towards the sea.

2712-814

* * *



The Jains who had no firm true knowledge
 ran along the bank of the river
 following the palm-leaf carried away by the river
 as if they would obstruct its flight,
 but the scroll carrying on it
 the subject matter liable to extinction
 was beyond their reach,
 and had already run
 the length of one hundred bows.
 And they could no longer see it.

2713-815.

* * *

When the scroll had rushed away, leaving them, as they say, in mid-stream, they ran far away, but fearing to disobey the command of the King, they came back again. Hiding their fear, they took courage to say, "Let him who confronts us drop his scroll in the waters, and we will watch what happens". The King, ignoring them and their words, looked at the Child Saint to know his mind. On his doing so, Sambandhar began to sing the decad which spelt the destruction of the delusion caused by alien religions. The King, by reason of his having been touched by the Chief of Cirapuram, and of his having been smeared by his hands with the sacred ash of the Lord adorned by Kondrai flowers which by their colour put to shame gold, and, moreover, since by reason of his being freed from his past Karma, and his attainment of equipoise of Karma, he now stood like a pair of scales in a state of equilibrium, and was in a fit condition to recognise the Primordial One.

Even though the Jains who were becoming fit candidates for disaster could not understand him, the Child wrote on the palm-leaf the decad he had composed for the occasion and dropped the palm leaf on the waters of the river rapidly rushing to mate with the sea.

This is the decad he composed on the spot for the occasion:

Hallowed be the ascetics,
 the heavenly ones, the genus of kine,
 Let the seasonal cool rains pour,
 may the King prevail;
 Sink shall evil;
 Let everything, by name of Haran,
 be girt (like protecting ramparts),
 that the world may of its misery be rid.

* * *

Carrying a fire in His hand
 He offers a rare sight to see;
 He delights to ride on a bull,
 Dark throated too is He.
 Lives He in the burning ghat,
 nevertheless, a Great Person is He.
 Who knows His nature?

* * *

Smears He the burnt ash on His body
 as fragrant cosmetic powder;
 Neither father nor mother has He;
 put an end will He to the Karma
 of those who meditate on Him only.
 My Father, He is,
 but what kind of a Person He is,
 who could say?

* * *

About the manner in which
 the Primeval Being bestows grace
 on those who become slaves unto Him,
 and about His greatness,
 if one attempts to enquire,
 it is a limitless subject;
 therefore, do not raise that matter!
 Fit to ask about these are only those
 who, with bowed-down head, worship
 our Father's feet,
 that planetary maleficence and Karma
 may not come near them.

* * *

With the processes of logic,
 such as "What is the cause"?
 Or
 "What precedents or examples are there?",
 do not research much into this.
 O you who would escape from great misery,
 fix your mind on Him
 and live in peace.
 O men eminent in goodness,
 come and surrender to the Lord.

* * *

He dances,
 He kicked the Lord of Death of rare might,
 He sings the Vedas;
 if you ask whether He does these for self-glorification,
 or that human beings may be rid of their sins,
 and that their repeated death and birth may be averted,
 those who are capable of research into this question,
 can they come to any other conclusion
 than that it is out of compassion for humanity?

* * *

Haven't you heard the knowledgeable ones say
 when Sandeswar cut off his father's foot
 which came into contact with the crown¹⁷
 of the Image of the Lord he was worshipping
 with fragrant just-about-to blossom flowers
 in his hand,
 and was bathing it with milk swollen
 in the udders of his cows,
 he reached the haven of the feet of the Lord
 with three eyes?

* * *

Deeming them as created for the special purpose
 of the people of the world chanting them
 to adore Lord Civan, the Principal of the Vedas,
 as the most Supreme Being,
 that they may not come to any harm,
 Chant the Eighteen Puranas¹⁸
 also called the Kali-k-kovai,
 narrated by Suta (the disciple of their author Vyaasar
 to the Rishis in Naimisaaranyam)
 which are headed by the ten Puranas on Lord Civan
 as the chiefest of them.

* * *

17. Sekkizhaar, in this Chronicle of Sandeswarar makes the irate
 father kick at the pot of milk, and not at the crown of the image.

18. The Puranas are:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Matsya-puraanam | 7. Bhavishya-p. | 13. Garuda-p. |
| 2. Koorma-p. | 8. Skanda-p. | 14. Naaraadeeya-p. |
| 3. Varaaha-p. | 9. Maarkandeya-p. | 15. Brahma-p. |
| 4. Vaamana-p. | 10. Brahmaanda-p. | 16. Padma-p. |
| 5. Civa-mahaa-p. | 11. Vishnu-p. | 17. Aagneya-p. |
| 6. Linga-p. | 12. Bhagavata-p. | 18. Brahmakaivarta-p. |

Very well famed is the fame of our Lord
 who, noticing the great sea
 becoming a menace to Vishnu,
 and desirous of conferring grace on him
 who, wearied on account of the sea around him
 tossing him about,
 left his bed on the sea-waters,
 ascended to the shore,
 came (to Thiruveezhimizhalai)
 and meditated in his heart on our Lord,
 presented the great disc to him.
 It is verily He, the Lord Civan, who,
 cherishing in His mind
 the desire to feed the nectar of ineffable fame
 to Vishnu, and Brahma skilled in the Vedas,
 and to the Devas who with them,
 ate the poison
 which rose like the black-death from the sea,
 and conferred His grace
 on those who churned the deadly seas
 fed by the three waters.¹⁹

* * *

Not only that.
 He is the Lord who rides on a bull,
 He is the One who established
 the First Tamil Academy in Madurai,
 He is the One who makes the palm-leaf go upstream,
 without the current holding it back,
 and surpass the terms of the challenge
 of those who do not have a firm belief in God.
 When we consider these characteristics,
 is it not true that the Great One
 who rides on a bull
 is the supreme one?

* * *

Sekkizhaar spends as many as twenty-four stanzas in giving exposition to the above stanzas word by word, phrase by phrase. Not all of them are required for our purpose. One stanza will do.

19. The three waters—the subterranean waters, the surface waters and the rain waters.

In the palm-leaf in which
 Sambandhar had established
 that our Lord Civan is all objects,
 as a result of his including therein the words,
 "May the King prevail!"
 (the Tamil word used being 'onguha',
 namely "rise up")
 the hunched back of the Paandiyan King
 straightened up
 like the straight sceptre
 of the famous Anapaayan,
 —the Cola King,
 of chest decked with lotus flowers.

2745-847

* * *

What more is there to say? The Jain monks immolated themselves by impaling themselves on the sharp upright stakes. Foolish people ask why Sambandhar did not intervene and persuade them not to do so. Their foolishness is only matched by the display of the low grade of their own character. But, in all other respects, they were men of honour as much as they were men of their word. Let alone Sambandhar. Not even the King, nor the Queen, not even the gods they worshipped, or their Theerthankars could have persuaded them to dishonour their own word.

The Paandiyan, looking at his minister said:
 "These Jains, who had made a bet
 and lost in this test
 of the respective powers of their religions,
 had already done undesirable wrong
 to the Child Saint;
 Impale them on the lethal sharp stakes
 and execute the justice due to them."

2751-853

* * *

Hearing that,

the Pure and illuminated One who hailed from Pukali,
 though he had no hatred towards the Jains,
 said, "This is fitting",
 and did not forbid the action of the King
 noted for his lack of excesses,

because the unworthy Jains
had set fire to the Mutt
in which the Caivite devotees were camping.

2752-854.

* * *

That a few fanatical Jain monks basking under the favour of a King should have been responsible for the fall of Jainism in Tamilnadu is an irony of fate which cannot be easily forgotten, for the Tamil Language is eternally indebted to the Jains for their Cilapathikaaram, Jeevaka-Chinthamani, Nannool the Grammar, and numerous other works. Even a single fanatic is, however, enough to do lasting harm to a people.

Sambandhar's mission on earth ceased with the defeat of the Jain monks, and their self-immolation on upright sharp stakes.

Sekkizhaar lingers lovingly over the departure of Sambandhar from Madurai. But we must hasten on. The King, the Queen and Kulachchiraiyaar, the Chief Minister, all accompanied Sambandhar to eleven shrines and returned to Madurai from Manamerrkudi, the birth-place of Kulachchirraayar, a town on the boundary dividing Paandinaadu from Cholanaadu.

Sambandhar's father had joined him at Madurai, obviously after the victory over the Jain monks, and accompanied him for the rest of the fifth tour till Sambandhar's return to Seekaazhi. On this fourth leg of the tour beginning from Madurai, a few interesting incidents took place.

Travelling from Thiruppaathaleechchuram, a village of 36 minutes journey to the north-west of Mannargudi in Thanjavoor District he reached the banks of River Mullivaai which was in heavy floods.

The pliers of coracles had tied up their crafts and had gone to their village. Sambandhar made his retinue board the boat, and without the help of a punting pole, made the coracle reach the other shore safely by the spiritual power of his songs only. From that day, the river is called Odampookki, the River on which a coracle was steered across.

Here, Sambandhar crossed out to the southern side of the River Cauvery and, after a visit to another four shrines, reached Thiruththelichchery, a village one kilometre from Kaaraikkaal. Nearby at Bhodhimangai was a Buddhist Monastery. Its chief Abbot, in arrogance and in abusive words, challenged Sambandhar to a polemical debate on the merits of their respective religions. The maternal uncle who accompanied Sambandhar in all his tours, and wrote down on the spot the songs sung by the Child Saint became enraged and, with fury in his heart, sang the last but one stanza of the Panchaaksharapatikam (decad) addressed by Sambandhar to the assembly of Brahmana Pundits on the merits of the Mystic Five Letters, immediately after his investiture with the sacred thread,

They are the well-researched dogma
of those with minds which do not accept
the lies of the Buddhists
and the Jains who carry in their hand
the Kazhu—a sheaf of grass.
They become the sword which cleaves
the inimical acts against those
who wear the ash of the Adept.
Such are the Five Letters!

Singing the stanza, the amanuensis of the poem, added a curse, "Let a roaring thunder-bolt strike here, and let the Buddhan too fall dead on the spot." On this incident being reported to the Child Saint, he said: "This is the gracious decree of Lord Civan to remove the obstacle that stood in our way. All of you shout in chorus, 'Hara, Hara'." The enraged but not discouraged Buddhists jeered at this act of the amanuensis and challenged the Child Saint saying, "Give up this black magic. Consent to debate with us in Speech." The Child Saint readily agreed and sent for the Buddhists for the debate. The debate was a debacle as far as the Buddhists were concerned, and they accepted their defeat and fell at the feet of the Child Saint.

Parimelazhagar's comment is very illuminating. He says, "Whether they speak graciously or in anger, their words will yield promptly the respective results." This was proved by the effect of the words of the amanuensis on the Abbot of the Buddhist Monastery.

Seized by an eager desire to meet Appar, Sambandhar hastened homewards and arrived at Poonthuruththi where Appar had already arrived. Hearing of the coming of Sambandhar, he went forward eagerly and, unbeknown to anyone, mixed in the crowd of devotees, and, displacing one of the bearers of the palanquin, put his own old shoulders under the pole joyously, and bore it along. Thirugnaanasambandhar, on a discordant thought arising in his mind, cried out:

"Now, where is Appar?"

On his saying so,



Appar of fame difficult to say in words, said:
 "Unparalleled Thavam
 have I performed in the past, and so
 I have the honour of bearing your feet,
 and am blessed indeed!"

2833-935

Hearing those words,
and filled with fear,
Sambandhar jumped down on to the earth,
and, humbly asked:
“What is the meaning
of your graciously doing thus?”
Arasu humbly countered with the reply,
“How else am I to serve
Thirugnaana-sambandhar?”

2834-936

* * *

All the devotees watching the scene fell prostrate on the ground and worshipped the two saints.

Thirugnaana-sambandhar embraced Thirunaavukkarasar with ardour, and Arasu worshipped the blossom feet of Sambandhar and both reached Thiruppoonthuruththi together.

The King of Unique Speech enquired from the Prince of Pukali about his journey up and down, and he told him everything in elaborate detail.

Appar paid Sambandhar the tribute of calling him: “You became a big encircling fence for the heavenly crop called sacred service to grow to great heights. God bless you!” Appar heard with delight all the details which Sambandhar was only too delighted to relate and relive the joyous victorious experiences.

On Appar relating to Sambandhar his trip to Kanchi and the spiritual delights he experienced, Sambandhar too was seized with a desire to visit Kanchi. They stayed together in Appar’s Camp for some time, but soon parted company. Appar to worship Nataraajar in Thillai and Sambandhar to return to Pukali. Appar and Sambandhar never met again. Here ended the mission for which Appar and Sambandhar, the Isvarakotis, were born on earth.

Sambandhar, just like Appar, and Sundarar of a later period, never let go the opportunity of worshipping the Lord at whatever shrine that lay on his way from one place to another. His return trip to Seekaazhi was no exception to this rule.

After his long tour of several years, Sambandhar rested at Seekaazhi for some time, visiting the temple therein and singing many decads.

On arrival at Seekaazhi, when Sambandhar entered his house, Sekkizhaar sings:

On arriving at his house,
when the mothers of the Brahmana clan
came forward and worshipped his feet,
he remembered the Mother
in the pure boat on top of the temple
and remained worshipping Her
in his mind.

2856-958.

* * *

Persuading his father, who wished to accompany him, to stay back, Sambandhar set out on his 6th and final tour of pilgrimage centres. He covered during this tour as many as 41 shrines. The space provided by this book, much as it is, will not permit us to follow him from shrine to shrine. It is significant that the first shrine and the last shrine, he visited on this tour was Thillai.

We shall see what happened at Thiruvoththoor the 14th shrine in his itinerary and another incident which happened at Mylapore, the 34th shrine he visited during this tour. He set out on this tour with the object of visiting Kanchi, but actually went first to Thillai. In this tour, he went as far as Thiruvotriyoor, less than 16 kilometres from Madras.

When Sambandhar arrived at Thiruvoththoor, a devotee of Lord Civan complained to the Child Saint that he was the object of ridicule by the Jains, as all the palm trees in his grove were of the male variety and did not therefore yield any fruit. The Jains jeered at him and his God Lord Civan, and taunted him saying, "If your Lord is so almighty, why don't you pray to Him to make these trees yield fruit?" On the spot, Sambandhar sang a decad praying to his Father, Lord Civan, to transform the palm trees into fruit-yielding female trees. As he concluded the eleventh and final stanza, the male palm trees were changed to female palm trees loaded with clusters of palm fruit. The Jains who watched this miracle happen were dumb-founded and seized with terror. The devotees of Civan, on the other hand, rejoiced uproariously.

This incident is dimmed almost into dark oblivion by the

incident which occurred in Mylapore, where Sambandhar went after his visit to Thiruvotriyoor.

There, at Mylapore, there was a very rich merchant, Vanikan as they call in Tamil, and Vaisya in Sanskrit. He was a very rich man, a *rara avis*, a rich man who was at the same time a great devotee of Lord Civan. He had an only child, a daughter who, like all fauna and flora of the tropical countries, grew with astonishing rapidity into an incomparably most beautiful girl when she became nubile.

The merchant had heard of the unique fame of Sambandhar and hitched his wagon to the stars by aspiring to marry his daughter to Sambandhar.

On all long-standing relatives
asking him for the hand of his daughter,
Civanesanaar replied:

"To him, whom Kaazhi city
where learned men live, owns,
I, this slave, have bestowed unconditionally
this flower-like damsel begot by me,
and the wealth amassed by me,
and myself as well."

2951-1053

* * *

On one of the days
which Civanesar passed in this manner,
his divine-damsel-like daughter went out
along with her handmaidens of long tresses
to a flower-garden adjoining her virgin-keep
with the intention of plucking
dew-laden flowers.

While she was plucking
with her bangle-laden tender hands
flowers about-to-blossom,

2953-1055

* * *

as if Destiny
which had concluded in its mind,
that this gift,
other than being of a nature
of an impulsive one made
by excessive ardour of joy,
would not suit the Guardian of Pukali

of waters which shimmer with gold,
 took the form of a young snake of sharp teeth
 and came forward,
 a snake of teeth sharp as a thorn came. 2954-1056

* * *

And bit her hand. She died as a matter of course, in spite of Civanesar spending a fortune in trying to bring her back to life. Finally, he cremated her and placed her ashes in an urn which he religiously placed on the bed of his dead daughter and, according to ancient belief and custom, cooked all the delicacies the girl had liked in her life, and offered them all most solicitously to the ashes in the urn.

News was brought to him of the departure of Sambandhar from Otriyoor. News of his progress towards Mylapore was reported to him metre by metre. He gave gifts to all those who brought the glad tidings, and arranged for a canopy to be erected and red carpets to be laid all the long long way from Otriyoor to Mylapore.

As Sambandhar neared Mylapore, Civanesar went forward and received him. Sambandhar heard from the lips of Civanesar all the happenings, and entered Mylapore.

Sambandhar grasped with his mind
 all that happened so far,
 and with the object of the objective
 of Civanesar being fulfilled,
 and with the object as well
 of the destruction of the alien sects
 of the Buddhists and Jains of false creeds,
 he graciously and gladly viewed the happenings,

2974-1076

* * *

and entered the temple of Kapaleechcharar. He bade Civanesar bring the urn containing the ashes of his daughter and place it at the outside of the ramparts of the temple. The father did so. The people of Mylapore, and residents of other places, and the graceless Jains as well, all thronged there, while the dwellers in the sky crowded in the sky.

Sambandhar considered that the way
to bring back to life
persons who had died in this world
is to make the bones fall into the shape
of the dead person;
and, therefore, cast a gracious look
at the pot containing the limbs
and called the girl by name.

2984-1086

He sang:

The gain which people born
on this eternal earth get
is the privilege of feeding the devotees
of the Lord who wears a moon on His crown.
Next in merit comes
the joy gained
in witnessing with one's eyes
the pomp and glory of the famous festivals
of the Lord.
If these objectives are true,
do come out of the pot
into the presence of the people of the world.

2985-1082

* * *

Worshipping the eternal Lord of long locks;
when he reached the word 'Pothiyo' (come out).
in the decad beginning with the words
"Mattitta".
by the power of the nectar
which was the true holy words,
those limbs one by one
came together inside the pot.

2986-1088

* * *

At the end of that song, the lost breath and body's shape came
back resplendently. But before the body contained in the pot
could rise and come out, Sambandhar sang the stanza about the
Jains. The moment he sang,

"The unbelieving Jains and Buddhist monks
will declare that this deed is impossible."
a bangles-crowded rosy hand appeared,
the pot broke,



and she who stepped out of it
looked as if Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth,
was stepping out of a lotus
whose closed petals were then falling apart. 2988-1090

*

*

*

Only a poet like Sekkizhaar can see in the pieces of a breaking apart mud pot the unfolding petals of a lotus flower. Perhaps, it was the bewitching hour of sunrise when the sun reaches out its long rays to kiss the sleeping flowers. Sekkizhaar devotees several stanzas to describe item by item the beauty of each limb of the girl.

Civanesar stood by the vow he had publicly made and begged Sambandhar to marry his daughter. Sambandhar graciously refused. Refusals usually leave a sense of resentment in the man whose request has been brushed aside, but not so when great saints or God refuses a petition of a genuine devotee who does not know what is good for him. He humbly says, "Your will is my will" and is quite happy.

Sambandhar proceeded on his tour back home, the last shrine he visited being Thillai just as it was the first town he visited at the commencement of his sixth and final tour.

Sambandhar's father and the august Brahmanas of his town arrived at Thillai and took him home. There they raised the question of his marriage and made him agree to a marriage with the daughter of Nambiaandaar Nambi of a place appropriately called Thiru-p-perumanam. Thiruneelanakkars performed the marriage ceremony in the temple of Lord Civan in Sambandhar's father-in-law's village.

Sambandhar participated with secret amusement in the ceremony. When he went round the ceremonial fire with his little finger entwined in the littler finger of his bride, the fire grew into an Effulgence and everyone who had come to the wedding entered the Effulgence and reached the haven of the holy feet of Lord Civan. Thiruneelanakkars, Murukanaar, Thiruneelakanta-p-perumpaaanar and his wife, Chiruththondar, Kungiliya-Kalayar, Sambandhar's parents, maternal uncle, the bride, bride's-maids, many entered the Effulgence and went to the Land of No Return.

For a child of no more than sixteen years, Thirugnaanasambandhar showed a remarkable understanding of human nature and a spirit of rare conformity with the common man's aspirations and foibles in spite of his own unrivalled knowledge of the Past, Present and Future, of here, of the hereafter and of Anmai—a region beyond the hereafter, that is, the several future births. These are called Immai, Marumai, and Anmai.

Thirugnaana-sambandhar did as much for Caivism as Adi Sankara Bhagawad-paadaal did for Vedantism. Sri Adi Sankarar acknowledged the services of Sambandhar when he referred to Sambandhar as "Dravida Sisu," the Dravida Child, in his Saundaryalahari.

3. SERVANT OF GOD

APPAR

In Tamil, just as if any one says "Moovar"—"The Three", he will be understood as referring to Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra, similarly, if any one says "Naalvar", "The Four", everyone will understand him to refer to Saint Thirugnaana-sambandhar, Saint Thirunaavukkarasar, more well-known as Appar, Sundarmoorthy Swamikal and Saint Manikkavaachakar. These four are called "Samaya-Kuravar"—"Fathers of the Faith". The lives of the first three are recorded by Sekhizhaar in his Periya-puranam. The Thiruvachakam is the auto-biography of Manikkavaachakar.

Apart from the conventional roles assigned to these four as followers of particular types of Pathways to God, such as the role of Servant or Dasamaargam (Appar), the role of Son or Satputra-maargam, (Thirugnaana-sambandhar), the role of Companion or Sakha-maargam (Sundaramoorthy Swamikal), and the role of the Gnani or the Knower treading the Pathway of Gnosis, i.e., Gnaana-Maargam (Manikkavaachakar), they played another set of roles too.

Sundaramoorthy Swamikal, in addition to consolidating the gains achieved by Thirugnaana-sambandhar and Appar for Caivism, showed man that he might lead a house-holder's life, and still be an outstanding devotee of God, in fact, gain Mukti, freedom from the cycle of deaths and births. Manikkavaachakar showed man by his very life, a life of a Pilgrim's Progress on the Pathway to God, the arduous journey through the dark alleys of the Purgative Way, the journey through the lighted passage of the Illuminative Way, and the blissful journey through the Unitive Way to Integration with the Godhead. Thirugnaana-sambandhar was the Defender of the Faith. Through his thousands of songs he rekindled in the people of his time, and rekindles for us too, the pride in his village and in his temples and faith in his religion. Appar's role was totally different from those of the other three Fathers of the Faith. He was a forerunner to Thirugnaana-sambandhar even as John the Baptist was a Forerunner to Lord Jesus Christ, and Kumaarila Bhattar to Adi Sankarar.

Appar's life can be said to revolve round the life of Thirugnaana-sambandhar. The pivotal points are three. His first meeting with Thirugnaana-sambandhar at Seekaazhi was one. An elderly man, in his early fifties meeting a child who has just completed seven years! An extraordinary scene of such an aged man prostrating before a child whom he has known so far by hearsay only! The second pivotal point was again a meeting with Sambandhar at Thiruppuhaloor, a man in his mid-fifties and a boy of, in all probability, twelve years or a year or two less. A very historic meeting—a meeting where, at the very sight of each other, without a moment's hesitation, each prostrated at the feet of the other, leaving in unresolved doubt all those who witnessed this event then, as well all the generations of people since then to this day, as to who prostrated before whom in the first instance! The third and last pivot is the occasion of Sambandhar's triumphant return after uprooting Jainism in Paandinaadu. Now Appar slipped, unnoticed by anyone, through the throng of seas of devotees and put a shoulder to the pole of the palanquin on which Sambandhar was riding. His mission over, his role having been played, Appar spent the rest of his life, perhaps nearly three decades of it, in wending his way to Kailas and back, in wending his way to Thiruppuhaloor singing his swan-song:

Meditate I would;
 but what shall I meditate on
 unless I meditate on nothing other than the feet of
 my Lord;
 sightless would I be
 who have no other succour,
 unless I see nothing but your anklet-girt sacred feet,
 worshipping them all the time with joined palms.
 To one dwelling you provided nine doorways;
 when all of them close at one and the same time,
 I may not feel like this;
 O Virtuous One, to Your feet I come,
 O Virtuous One who abide in Poompuhaloor!

Appar was born in the same State as Sundaramoorthi Swamikal where Narasingamunaiyar ruled in later days. It is quite possible that in Appar's time, an ancestor of Narasingamunaiyar ruled over the same State. In that State, there was a town called Aamoor quite close to Thiruathikai and not far from Thiru-nalloor where Sundaramoorthi Swamikal was born. Appar was born to Pukazh-

anar and Maathiniyar, a couple of the peasantry class of that place. They had already a daughter called Thilakavathiyaar. He was named Marulneekkiyaar. His sister was betrothed to a man called Kalippakaiyaar. He was employed in the army. Her parents died one after the other before her marriage was performed, and Kalippakaiyaar, the fiance of Thilakavathiyaar, also died in a battle. Though only betrothed to him, she considered herself as his wedded wife and decided to ascend the funeral pyre along with his body. Her orphaned younger brother, wailed "What is to happen to me?" and begged her to live for him. She agreed and spent her time in bringing up her brother, and in doing service to Lord Civan abiding in the temple called Veerattaanam in a town called Athikai on the bank of the River Kedilam. Her brother grew expert in spiritual and secular learning and reached manhood and took charge of his vast property. Like any fond mother or sister in the position of a guardian, Thilakavathiyaar would not have neglected her duty, but would have performed her brother's marriage in due course. Appar must have been a married man when he discharged his household duties and social obligations about which Sekkizhaar has the following three stanzas:

Realising the impermanence of worldly life,
he performed several charities,
establishing his fame in the world
by generous endowments for them,
and, moved by compassion, he set up
charitable feeding houses and water booths.

1300-35.

*

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Avenues of trees he planted, tanks he dug,
and, remaining unfailing
in the discharge of the obligations
to which he was committed (as a rich man),
he joyously gave to those who sought his help
whatever they needed;
and hospitality he bestowed
on those who came to his doors;
moreover, he gave largesses liberally to literary people
that their prosperity might increase;
and (to crown all) he stood supreme
in the act of giving alms unfailingly
to all the dwellers in the world.

1301-36

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Sekkizhaar states in the above poem that Appar discharged the duties laid on a householder in Chapters 22 and 23 of Thirukkural in the section on Duties of a Householder, duties which cannot be discharged without the help of a wife. Especially, hospitality. Appar must have been a married man, notwithstanding Sekhizhaar not saying so.

Since the custodians of the Caivaite Faith were complacent about the dangers to Caivaism from the day to day waxing power of Jainism, Appar decided to personally enter the arena and gain knowledge of the strength and weaknesses of Jainism. Referring to this decision of Thirunaavukkarasar, Sekkizhaar sings:

Nillaatha ulakiyalpu kandu,
 "untilaiya—vaazhkai allen" endru
 arrath—thurranthu,
 samayangal aanavatrin nallaarru
 therinthu unara—
 Nambar arulaamaiyinaal—
 Kollaamai marrainthu urraiyum
 aman samayam kurrukinaar.

1302-37.

* * *

Realising the impermanent nature of the world,
 and saying to himself,
 "I am not for this ephemeral life,"
 he renounced it altogether,
 and that he might learn and understand
 the goodly Pathway to God of various religions—
 the Lord God not bestowing His grace on him—
 he approached Jainism,
 which was masquerading
 under the cloak of 'Not-killing'.

1302-37.

Appar was filled with a desire to know about the Pathway to God offered by other religions. Among them, the most important was Jainism. And what did Appar do? What does Sekkizhaar say that Appar did? He says, 'kurrukinaar'. Its synonym is 'anukinaar'. What do both words mean? The corresponding English word is 'approached'. If Sekkizhaar had meant to say 'joined', he would have said 'saarndhaar' or 'serndhaar'. Sekkizhaar's special metier is his precise use of the absolutely correct word.

If Appar had genuinely become a convert to Jainism, would not Sekkizhaar have given us a graphic account of his doubts and disappointments with Caivism, of the fierce battle of his soul with his loyalty to Caivism and his new love for Jainism? Sekkizhaar does no such thing. He merely states that desirous of knowing the truths about other religions, Appar approached Jainism. On the strength of this all too inadequate material people have preferred to believe that Appar was an apostate, not once but twice.

Arriving at the town called Paatalipuththiram,
he went to the Jain Monastery.
There, the Jains skilled in expounding their religion,
surrounded him and dinned into him
many points to create in him a desire to join them,
believing as truth that their religion
was indeed the way to gain Mukti. 1303-38

* * *

There, Appar studied with mounting eagerness
all the rare canonical books of Jainism,
and gained an excellent insight into that religion.
The Jains of fat, totally naked, body
conspiratorially rejoiced,
and conferred on him the name of Dharmasenar,
the highest title in their hierarchy. 1304-39.

* * *

If Appar did not join the Jain monastery, what could have been the reason for his approaching Jainism, leaving all the privileges and pleasures of a rich landlord?

Appar "approached" Jainism and entered the Jain monastery at Pataliputra not as a genuine convert to that religion but for other ulterior reasons. Appar was a Father of the Faith. He was a fore-runner to Sambandhar. He was a seer and a mystic. He was a Jeevan-mukta. Even as John the Baptist knew of the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and Kumaarila Bhattar knew of the coming of Adi Sankarar, Appar too knew of the coming of the Son of God, of Thirugnaana-sambandhar. He knew that Sambandhar would live only sixteen years. He also knew of the purpose for which Sam-

bandhar, an Isvarakoti, a person whom Sekkizhaar declares, as 'oru pirrappum eithaamai udaiyaar' (2162-264) 'a person who need not take any birth', was taking birth on earth. His life will be short; he cannot and should not spend time studying the religious situation right from the bottom. Therefore Appar deliberately courted the calumny of being branded as an apostate and approached Jainism, and joined its monastery as a novice. Appar was over twenty-one years of age when he took charge of his estate and discharged the duties of a householder. He would have been twenty-five years of age when he joined the Jain Monastery. It would have taken him not less than twenty years to become a Dharmasenar. Appar would have been no less than forty-five years of age at the pinnacle of his career as a Jain monk. During all the years Appar was in the Jain monastery, he had never forgotten the role in the world he was born to play as a Father of the Faith. He now remembered that Sambandhar would have been born at Seekaazhi, would in fact be six years of age. In another year, Sambandhar would be invested with the sacred thread, and would set out on his mission, for which he was born on earth, an Isvarakoti who, according to Sekkizhaar, need never have taken birth on earth.

Appar decided to leave the Jain Monastery; fortuitously for him, a terrible colic came to his aid. It did not yield to all the ministrations of the Jain monks who tried medicines, Mantras, mesmerism, and magic, all to no avail.

On the failure of the Jain medicine-men to cure his colic, Appar decided to go to his sister for nursing. He had asked his sister to come to him. She was under the belief that he was an apostate from Caivism, and, therefore, self-righteously refused to go there, but bade him go to her.

Sekkizhaar relates:

On hearing those words,
he became wearied at heart,
and said to himself—
because God's grace had been restored to him—
“That this misery
which has not been rid of
by this inadequate petty religion

may be got rid of,
I shall go to the feet of Thilakavathiyaar
who has taken to the perfect path."

Sekkizhaar describes very graphically the departure of Appar from the monastery.

(On coming to this decision),
his weariness of body and spirit left him;
and, in order to reach Thiruvathikai,
he discarded the coarse mat he wore,
discarded the rope sling
and the pot of food carried in it;
abandoned the switch of peacock feathers,
and set out determinedly for Athikai.

* * *

After leaving behind the precincts
of Jains of false doctrine-dwelling heart,
Appar wrapped around his body the white cloth
of those who would tread the Pathway to Mukti
which would gain them apprehension of the Reality;
and, having no one to guide him by the hand,
he arrived in the night, unseen by anyone,
at Thiruvathikai where dwelt she of perfect Thavam. 61

* * *

Imagine Appar in the position of an Abbot of a monastery. Twenty to twenty-five years, in an environment totally surcharged with the theology and dogma, with the practices and penances, with the power and prestige which go with life in such an environment, can possibly make even an Appar forget at certain moments the purpose for which he joined the monastery in the dim past, twenty-five years ago. In fact, some of his songs have passages of regret for having spent such long years in Jainism, passages in which we can reasonably read the risk Appar ran of forgetting his mission, of foregetting his role as a Father of the Faith. Appar had, perhaps, to be jolted out of such complacency, and God sent the cruel colic just for that purpose. Appar's sister pleaded with God for Appar's return to the true Faith, and, in His wisdom, God used the occasion to fulfil His purpose. In the moment of his unbearable suffering, Appar thought of his sister and went to her, and God carried out His Will.

Appar reached his sister's house, and she promptly haled him before the highest court on earth or in the heavens. The court was the temple of Lord Civan in Thiruathikai-Veerattaanam, and the judge was Lord Civan.

Appar stood in the cage set apart for the accused, and pleaded his own case. Truth was his solicitor, his attorney, his defending counsel. Truth being his defending counsel, Appar, in his plea, takes an aggressive attitude, very much unlike what one would expect of a remorseful, repentant renegade. He sang:

This throes-of-death-like suffering,
 You do not relieve me from;
 Wickedness many, commission thereof,
 I do not remember committing.
 O Rider on the bull! Your feet, day and night,
 never parting from them,
 have I been worshipping ever and always.
 Baffling my understanding,
 in the interior of my abdomen,
 the colic contorts
 and throws into convulsions
 my intestines.
 Bear it, I, Your slave, cannot,
 O Lord who abide in Veerattaanam
 of Athikai on the banks of Kedilam!

2

* * *

My heart as abode for You only
 have I reserved;
 Without thinking of you,
 I do not know of any occasion
 when I have remained.
 Perfidy similar to this
 I am not aware of ever having seen.
 Contorting and cramping my abdomen,
 this thing which has turned into poison
 and is tormenting me,
 You have not driven away
 from approaching me
 nor have You withdrawn it from me.
 Neither do You say, "Fear not",
 O Lord who abide in Veerattaanam
 of Athikai on the banks of Kedilam!

3

* * *

The submissive one's sins
 You are capable of absolving.
 Receiving alms in a severed and bleached skull,
 You wander about.
 When, after having boldly come to a decision,
 I live serving You alone,
 You do not relieve me
 of the colic which burns my entrails.
 With the ashes of the deceased,
 You are capable of smearing Your body.
 Is it not the duty of eminent people
 to put an end to the Karma
 of those who have sought refuge with them,
 O Lord abiding in Veerattaanam
 in Athikai on the banks of the Kedilam
 where women with the gait of swans abound?

4

* * *

Since the guardians (of the Caivite Faith)
 neglected their duty of guardianship,
 and, when (on my asking questions
 about the depth of the dangerous tank called Jainism)
 the by-standers taunted me by saying,
 "Enter into the water and find out for yourself,"
 I entered the tank
 without knowing any spot
 where I could stand on my feet.
 I had never before heard words of advice like this.
 (On entering the waters),
 I have been seized by the cramps
 which now torment my abdomen.
 O Lord who abide in Veerattaanam
 in Athikai on the banks
 of the roaring waters of Kedilam!

5

* * *

Water, flower, incense,
 I have never known myself to forget
 to offer to You;
 Songs in Tamil set to music
 I have never known myself forget
 to sing in praise of You.
 When good or evil beset me
 I have never known myself forget You.
 Your name to chant with my tongue,
 I have never known myself to forget;

O Lord who roam about
 receiving arms in a perfectly dry skull!
 Do graciously rid me
 of the colic which is inside my body.
 I am wearied, O Lord Who abide
 in Veerattaanam of Athikai
 on the River Kedilam!

6

* * *

I rose in prosperity of family-life
 and lavish riches:
 as there is no one but You to exercise control over me;
 and when I, duly enlightened, made myself
 a slave unto You,
 and led my life to the best of my lights,
 this colic hurts me.
 Do graciously get rid of it for me!
 When it digs into the innards of my abdomen
 and turns it over, and cuts it,
 and pulls it apart,
 I am seized with terror and I faint away.

* * *

Disgusted with family life,
 I gladly gave it up;
 as I had no perfidious objective in my heart;
 and, now, when I am weary of this life
 there is no succour for me,
 (except You).
 O my Lord who have on Your ear
 a ring of white conch!
 With wicked glee,
 this colic contorts and convulses
 the bottom of my abdomen
 and eats up my innards;
 I, Your slave, am wearied,
 O Lord who abide in Veerattaanam
 in Athikai on the River Kedilam.

8

* * *

O Lord with body that shimmers like gold,
 O Lord with tangled russet locks,
 O Lord with pining moon,
 distress, dejection, disease,

these, neither do You drive away
from approaching me,
nor do You withdraw them from me.
People like me will never any more trust You.
If this is the fate of devotees,
then let us call a halt to love of You,
O Lord who abide in Veerattaanam
in Athikai on River Kedilam!

9

* * *

You covered Yourself
with a wet hide
stripped from an elephant,
O You who are capable of dancing
with the cremation ground as Your stage!
Think back on Your bestowing grace
by crushing under the huge mountain
the Raakshasa who noisily boasted
that he would prise and take away
the Kailasa Mountain;
I sweat, roll about, fall, rise,
yet You do not do away with my agony,
O Lord who abide in Veerattanam
of Athikai on River Kedilam!

10

Let us recall to mind that Appar sang elsewhere:

“All the days on which
one has not spoken of Him
of Perumpattra-p-puliyoor,
all such days are days on which one has not lived.”

* * *

Because it was true in his case that no day, no hour, no minute, no second ever passed in his life without speaking of Lord Civan, not even in the long years he spent in the Jain Monastery, because of this fact which Lord Civan cannot deny, he could assert “all the days on which one has not spoken of Him in Perumpattra-p-puliyoor are days on which one has not lived.”

Appar, then, was no apostate, neither once nor twice.

Thiruvathikai-veerattaanam was in those days under the rule of a Pallava king who had become a Jain. This King sent his myrmidons to capture and bring Appar before him. Appar was

carried away by his captors, and brought before the Pallava King. In the presence of the irate King, Appar sang:

Subject to any one we are not;
 Death we do not fear;
 By hell's tortures, we will not be deterred;
 tremble we do not.
 Exult we shall; disease we do not know;
 submit we will not;
 joy eternal is our lot; sorrow is not for us.
 Becoming irredeemable slave unto Sankaran
 of the distinction
 of being never a subject to any one—
 that king who has a ring
 of genuine conch pendant on one ear,—
 We have arrived at His twin rosy feet
 which resemble freshly-picked blossoms.

* * *

The King consulted the Jain monks. They suggested to him one after the other, various kinds of tortures to kill Appar.

The Jain monks advised the King, as a first step, to imprison him in a burning kiln of limestone. The King ordered the monks to keep him there for a week and then open the kiln to find out if he had been reduced to ashes. Appar was not affected by the heat of the kiln. Seated in the kiln he sang:

Even like the flawless music of the Veena
 and the twilight moon,
 like the gentle zephyr from the south,
 and the just-coming-up early summer,
 like the pond hovered over by humming bees,
 is the sheltering shade of my Father,
 the Immanent Lord's twin feet.

* * *

When the kiln was opened after seven days, to the alarm and astonishment of the Jain monks, Appar was found unharmed. The monks reported the matter to the King. On their advice, the King ordered poison to be given to him in his food. Appar drank it, rather ate it, cheerfully. The poison turned in the mouth of Appar into Amrita, the elixir of life. The fanatical, but frightened

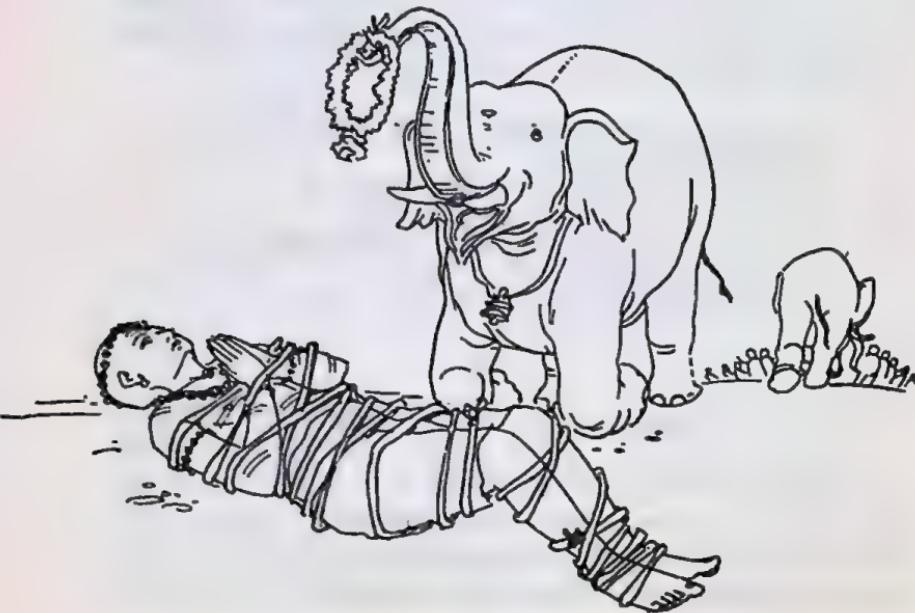
monks ran back to the King with this unpleasant news. On further advice from them the King ordered the monks to let loose a mad elephant on Appar so that it could trample him under its foot. This was done immediately. Appar faced the fierce beast fearlessly and sang:

Powdery white ash, sandal paste,
bright moon, the ruby pendant
adorning the forehead,
clothing of beautiful hide,
hue of living and growing coral,
a bellicose bull
who is really the famous safeguard called 'Dharma',
a snake encircling the broad breast,
and the deep good waters of the River Kedilam,
the One who owns these,
His protege are we;
there is not a single thing which we fear;
nothing could happen to us in the future
which can frighten us.

Vol. IV. d. 2 s. 1.

* * *

The result was totally contrary to the expectations of the monks. The elephant approached Appar, but instead of killing



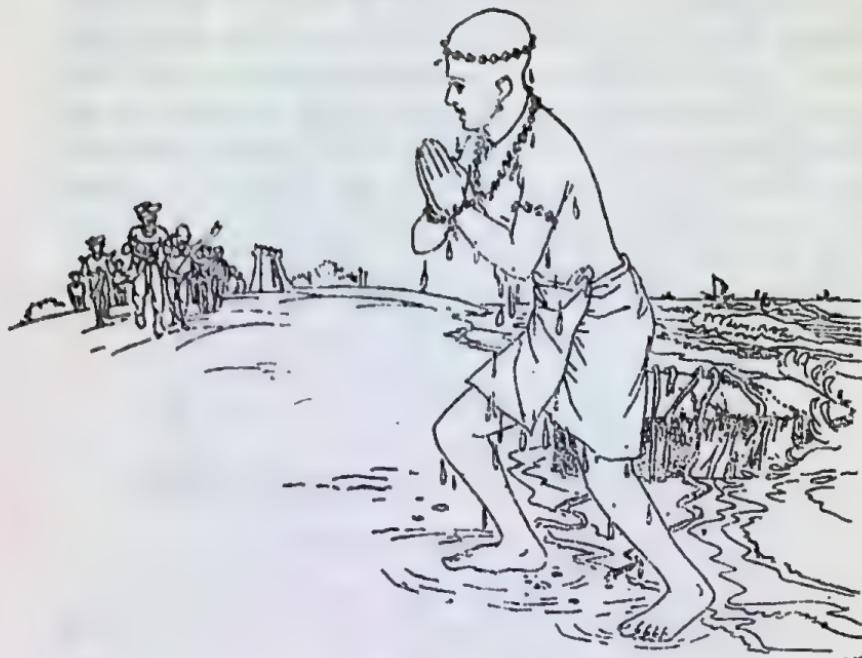
him, it bent its knees and bowed before him, and turned back in fury on the monks themselves. When they fled in terror, it caught several of them, and trampled them under its feet. The monks, terrified beyond limit, ran back to the King with this terrible news. Lastly, on their advice, he ordered them to tie Appar to a column of granite stone and fling him and the stone into the sea. He and the monks believed that Appar would never come back alive but would sink into the sea and die. But the stone bearing Appar, who was strongly tied to it floated, on the bosom of the sea. Appar, when he found himself thus flung into the sea, sang a song, a declaration of Faith and Hope. He sang:

He is the Word,
 He is the Succour,
 He is the Vedas Incarnate,
 He is the Effulgence,
 He is the Heavenly One.
 On contemplating His gold-matching perfect feet
 is one's heart,
 and worshipping them with one's hands,
 even if one is tied to a stone
 and is launched on the sea,
 what becomes good Succour to one
 is Na-Ma-Chi-Vaa-Ya only.

* * *

“Namachchivaaya Vaazhka”—“Hallowed be Namachchivaaya” sang Manikkavaachakar, and concluded the line with the words, “Naathan thaal vaazhka”—“Hallowed be the Feet of Naathan!” Sambandhar expounded Manikkavaachakar and sang, “Naathan Naamam Namachchivaayave!”—“The Name of Naathan is none else than Namachchivaaya!” Appar clarified, “He is the Word—Namachchivaaya!” Naadam is one term of the triune, Naadam, Bindu, Kalai. The Formless (and, consequently, nameless) Godhead, the One neither with form nor altogether formless (the amorphous state of the Godhead represented by the Lingam), and the one with names and forms. In Sanskrit, the set of names for the triune is “Nishkalam, Sakala-nishkalam, and Sakalam.” The term given by the Tamil theologians to the triune is “aruvam”, “aru-uruvaam”, and “uruvaam”. When you have to give a name to the formless state of the Godhead, you call it

"Namachchivaaya." Sambandhar placed this beyond doubt when he sang, "Naathan Naamam Namachchivaayave!"



On Appar making this declaration of Faith and Hope, the floating stone carried Appar to the shores of Thiru-p-paathiri-p-puliyoor which was close to Paathalipuram where all the tortures were inflicted on him.

Sekkizhaar's description of Appar as he stood on the beach is a most artistic painting in poetry. He sings:

A body in which stripes of pure white ash
glistened
low-strung garlands of Rudraaksha beads
around the neck,
a mind which was constantly and gently stroking
the rosy feet of his Lord,
eyes from which loving tears poured
as if they had thawed and melted,
a rosy mouth from which issued
perfect words of decades
in praise of the Lord Civan—
a person who had all these,
entered the streets of Thiru-p-paathiri-p-puliyoor. 1405-140

Appar has not yet begun going about with a hoe in his hand. Of course he cannot do so. For he has just walked out of the sea. His appearance on that occasion is described in the above stanza.

Thirteen shrines later, and, in terms of time, perhaps, six months to a year later, Sekkizhaar describes the form Thirugnaana-sambandhar saw when Appar called on him, at Seekaazhi. He now carries a hoe. Sekkizhaar sings:

An unremitting love-laden heart,
a langour in the sacred body,
a state of mind to which
clothing even was a superfluity,
a hand holding the hoe, his tool of service,
a rain of pouring tears,
sacred ash that shone on his frame,
in such eternal guise
Arasu approached him.

2168-270.

* * *

Why did the Pallava King and the Jain monks go to such terrible lengths to ensure the death of Appar? It is reasonable to think that if Appar had been an ordinary renegade, his desertion would not have been a matter for such radical measures; not even the desertion by a Dharmasenar could provoke such retributive acts of torture. Such acts can be justified only if we presume that the Jain monks had at last realised the true nature of Appar's conversion and reconversion. They realised with horror the terrible consequences which would follow on Appar returning to Caivism. They must have already learnt of the birth of Sambandhar, of the purpose for which his father prayed for a son. Appar and Sambandhar should never be allowed to meet. Appar therefore must be liquidated. We cannot understand otherwise the Jain monks to whom killing was an abhorrence resorting to unheard of methods of torture to put an end to Appar's life. But God willed otherwise.

On Appar landing thus on the beach of Thiru-p-paadhiripuliyoor, the local people received him with great joy, unbound him from the stone to which he had been tied and went along with him to the temple of Lord Civan in that place.

Appar stood before Lord Civan abiding in the temple at that sea-shore town and sang a decad. This was a decad of thanksgiving to the Lord for saving him from so many dangers and for bringing him safely to the shores of that city. He sang:

Like the Mother
who gave birth to me,
and like my Father as well,
and, moreover, like one
born like me to my parents,
He who rejoicingly created the three worlds,
the Friend of the heaven-dwellers,
graciously chose to abide in my heart
and at Thiru-p-paathiri-p-puliyoor
was an Invisible Succour to His devotee. IV. d. 94 st. 1.

* * *

Appar did not suffer in vain the most cruel tortures ever inflicted on a man in those times.

From Thiru-p-paathiri-p-puliyoor, Appar went to Thiruvathikaiveerattanam where abode the Lord who not very long ago had not only acquitted him of the charge of apostasy, but had also honoured him with the title of Naavukkarasar. There, in exuberance of joy and gratitude he sang, as many as fourteen decades. This was his second and last visit to Athikai-veerattanam, and he never returned to that shrine again.

Appar proceeded on his tour of pilgrimage from Thiruvathikai-veerattanam. He had gone to no more than three of them when he was seized by a fear for his life. He visited Thirumundeechuram, Thiruaamaaththoore, and Thirukkovaloor, and fled to Thiru-th-thoongaananai-maatam. From there, he retraced his steps for about eleven miles, came to Muthukundram from where he went east to Chidambaram. He never came back to Athikai-veerattanam or for that matter to Nadunadu at all. He seems to have thought it wise and safe to spend the rest of his life in Chola-naadu and Paandinaadu.

At Thiru-th-thoongaananai-maatam, the fourth shrine in his long pilgrimage, he made a pathetic plea born of paralysing fear.

What was this plea? Let us hear Appar sing:

Ponnaar thiruvadikku ondru undu vinnappam;
 potri seiyum
 en aavi kaappatharrku ichchai undel,,
 irung-Kootru akala
 Minnaaru Moovilai soolam en mel poori
 mevu kondal
 thunnaar Kadanhai ul Thoongaanai-maada-ch-
 chudar Kozhunthe!

* * *

O Tongue of a Flame
 abiding in the shrine Thoongaanai-maatam
 situated at cloud-capped Kadanhai,
 to Your gold-shaming feet
 here is a submission.
 If You have a desire to save my life,
 which I value very much,
 do brand me
 with the sign of the lightning-shaming trident
 that this great slander,
 (on my having been an apostate to Caivism)
 may be wiped out.

* * *

Appar is yet to go to Thillai, and therefore, his life is precious and has to be saved that he might witness the dance of Lord Civan, that he might meet Thirugnaanasambandhar and play the role assigned to him as a Father of the Faith.

What was the threat of death from which Appar fled to the presence of God and made his pathetic plea? Let us remember that this was the same Appar who, not more than a month or two ago, roared, "There is nothing which we fear; there is nothing which can occur to frighten us". What made him fear for his life and flee to God for protection? The last song he sang before leaving Thiruvathikai on his pilgrimage was a song of exultation, cheerful and pleasant, looking forward to his worshipping Lord Civan in all the shrines in Tamilnadu. It is the 7th decad in the Sixth Thirumurai. He had visited no more than three shrines when he sings in a different tune. The song in which he pleads to be branded with the sign of the trident comprises only three stanzas, the others

having been, probably, lost for ever. Here are the second and third stanzas.

If, saying to Yourself,
 "Who does this petty devotee think he is!"
 You fail to protect me
 from this rare kind of a fateful disease,
 a slur will sully Your name.
 O Lord of those who love You,
 apply on me the dust (ash) of Your feet,
 O Lord.....who abide in Thoongaanai-maadam!

* * *

The third stanza is a reference to the humbling of Ravana, and repeats the plea to be branded with the sign of the trident and the bull.

Appar uses the words 'arum pini noi', 'rare kind of a fateful disease'. Sekkizhaar interprets Appar as saying, "I cannot bear to live in this body which has been polluted by association with the Jains." If this was the reason for the request to be branded with the sign of the trident etc., the time to make the request was when he was singing as many as sixteen decades, one of them sung immediately on his return from the Jain Monastery, and the others after his safe return from the tortures of the Pallava King. But he sings this plea after he had begun his pilgrimage and had gone to three shrines.

The fact must be that the people in the three shrines he visited thought and said that he was an apostate and were enraged to the point of threatening him with physical violence. If the Pallava King was enraged to the point of desiring to put Appar to death for his defection, the Caivites of his neighbourhood, his kith and kin, were equally enraged by his defection, and made him fear for his life. Appar who was not afraid to die for Caivism at the hands of the Pallava King, and could flout him by declaring that there was nothing he feared, that same Appar was however unwilling to die for a false charge of apostasy. He wanted to live to fulfil his mission, to fulfil a role similar to that which John the Baptist played to Lord Jesus Christ, and Kumaarila Bhattar played to Adi Sankarar.

Besides the most compelling reason of putting a safe distance between his enraged kith and kin and himself, between death as an alleged apostate and life to play his role as a Father of the Faith, Appar had to make the acquaintance of Thirugnaana-sambandhar with the least possible delay. For, Sambandhar was approaching his seventh year and would soon be invested with the sacred thread, and would begin in right earnest to fulfil the purpose for which his father prayed for a son and in response to which God made him to be born on earth, him who had no need to be ever more born on earth.

From Muthu Kundram, Appar went to Thillai, apparently without stopping anywhere on the way, certainly without singing any songs at any shrine on the way. Thillai has always held the highest place in the hearts of Sambandhar, Appar, and Manikka-vaachakar and even of Sundaramoorthi Swamikal.

Sekkizhaar describes most picturesquely and graphically Appar's ecstasy when he worshipped Lord Nataraajar at Thillai. He sings that as Appar watched the Dance of Nataraajar:

Hands with joined palms held over the head
were engaged in paying obeisance;
Eyes were in the state
of unceasingly pouring a rain of tears;
Instruments of knowledge,
(Such as mind, intellect, power of discrimination,
and final assimilation of knowledge
and making it one's own)
were in a state of sympathetically melting
along with the eyes;
the body, blessed with this opportunity
of watching the dance,
was in a state of falling prostrate on the ground
only to quickly rise and fall again and again;
thus unlimited was the ardour
of him who was worshipping
the dance performed before him
by the Sire with His matted long locks
of lightning sheen singing in unison
with His choreographic gyrations.

1432-167

* * *

The reader will remember how Sundarar watched the same dance two centuries later on.

With his eyes monopolising to themselves
 the five great powers of perception—
 seeing, smelling, sensing, savouring, and hearing—
 with all the invaluable instruments of knowledge—
 mind, intellect, discrimination, and final
 appropriation of knowledge—
 all four transmuted into discrimination,
 with the qualities three—
 Thaamasam, raajasam, saatvikam—
 now transformed into saatvikam alone,
 he revelled in the flood of delight
 which flowed into him
 from the unique great dance of boundless bliss
 which the Lord with matted locks,
 where dwelt the moon,
 performed,
 and his whole being blossomed
 under the power of unremitting bliss.

252 T 10

* * *

An interesting incident occurred during this Darsan of Nataraajar. When Appar stood drinking in the unimaginable vision of Lord Civan's dance, the Lord asked him: "Hallo! When did you come?" Appar sang a decad in reply. The first stanza reads:

Become a devotee and sing Your praises,
 I do not;
 O Transcendent Being!
 O Transcendent Yogi!
 Even by deception,
 I do not pay devotion to You!
 Do not spurn me,
 O bestower of Mukti!
 O primeval One!
 O Father who dance on the Hall in Thillai!
 To see Your dance, this slave has come here.
 This is how it happens that I am here. IV d. 23. st. 1

* * *

From Thillai Appar went to Seekaazhi to keep his date with destiny, to begin to play his role as a Father of the Faith, to meet Thirugnaana-sambandhar, to pay his homage to the Child Saint. In terms of time, it could not have been much more than four to six months from the date of his return to Athikai after surviving the tortures inflicted by the Pallava King at the instigation of

desperate Jain monks. In terms of shrines visited since he set out from Athikai, Seekaazhi was the ninth. Let Sekkizhaar relate to us this momentous visit of a man of no less than forty-five years to a child less than one-sixth his age, a child who had just completed his seventh year and had, perhaps, not more than a few days ago been invested with the sacred thread.

Sekkizhaar sings:

Appar heard the devotees say reverential words
about the Brahmana lad—
abiding in Holy Kazzhumalam
which survived by floating on the flood waters of the sea
when it boiled on Doomsday—
who by the grace of the Lord seated on the boat,
by the grace of Him
Who has a bull as His mount
had fed on the milk
drawn from the holy breast
of the Daughter of the King of the Mountain,
with which gnosis had been blended
that he might increasingly gain in full
the gnosis of Civan.

1442-177

* * *

An amazing love grew in Appar's heart
immediately on hearing about the glory
of the Magnificent One hailing from Kaazhi
who, immediately on drinking the holy milk of the Devi,
could sing a glorious garland of Tamil Songs
set to the seven notes of music
and pointing at Him
who ate the poison which rose from the sea,
could declare "He here is my Lord."
Forthwith, a great desire arose in his mind
to worship the blossomy feet of the blessed Child.

1443-178

* * *

That very moment, he left Thillai for Seekaazhi, and stopping for a day at Thirunaaraiyoor to pay his homage to the Lord abiding thereat, he proceeded on his way and arrived at Thiruppukali. Describing his arrival at Seekaazhi, Sekkizhaar sings:

Surrounded on all sides by his throng of devotees,
with palms unceasing joined together
in worshipful pose,

With the compassion behind his sacred ash-drenched appearance
 displaying itself as a torrent of tears
 which melted the minds of those who saw it,
 Thirunaavukkarasar, who reached the sea-sprayed shores
 paddling a stone floating on the water,
 arrived at Holy Pukali
 of the Lord who uttered the revealed Vedas
 in versatile Tamil.

1445-180.

* * *

Hearing of the gracious arrival of Arasu
 whom the Lord with a long mountain as His bow
 enslaved formerly by graciously afflicting him
 with a cruel colic,
 Aaludaiya-pillaiyaar, Sambandhar too,
 filled with a very great desire to meet him,
 set out and went forward,
 surrounded by devotees
 with their minds surging with ardour.

1446-181.

* * *

On Arasu, who was approaching
 with palms joined in obeisance,
 passing with heart melting with love
 through the throng of devotees,
 and prostrating at the feet of Sambandhar
 with unstinting great love,
 Sambandhar, who wept and called forth
 Him Who comes riding on a bull,
 took hold of the hands of him
 who humbly prostrated at his feet,
 lifted him up with his blossomy hands
 paid obeisance to him,
 and hailed him "Appare!" "O Father!"—
 Appar in return exclaimed,
 "Your obedient servant!"

1447-182.

* * *

Why did Appar prostrate at the feet of the Child? Why did not the Child prostrate in return but lifted him by his hands? There can be only one answer. Appar saw in the Child the Son of God, saw the Saviour of Caivism, saw the personage with whom it was his assigned role to play as a forerunner, as his eyes

and ears, as his henchman, as his collaborator in the great enterprise of resurrecting Caivism and Tamil.

Sekkizhaar records that Appar stayed several days with Sambandhar. What did an elderly man of forty-five or more and a little boy of no more than seven years talk? Was there no generation gap' of which so much is said in these days? Did they plan their campaign? Did Appar inform Sambandhar of all his terrible experiences at the hands of the Jains? Did they agree to go on a further pilgrimage and prepare the people for the overthrow of Jainism and the revival of Caivism? Did they plan to meet again at a later date? Sekkizhaar is most disappointingly silent on this vital matter.

After leaving Sambandhar, Appar continued his own pilgrimage and arrived at Thiru-ch-chaththi-muttram. Elsewhere in this book, have been described the various kinds of Deckshas, acts by which God or God in the form of a Guru, takes a devotee under His wing. The highest of these is Thiruvadi-deekshai. God conferred this favour on Manikkavaachakar, Sundarar and Raamalinga Swamikal.

Appar now prayed for the favour.
 Before Death gets furious with me
 and speedily destroys me,
 O Lord, do imprint on me
 the seal of Your blossomy feet;
 if You let me go with Death
 without doing so,
 beware that never-ageing, total infamy
 will drown Your name.
 O Lord with a hand bearing a roaring fire!
 O ever-youthful tendril of a Civan
 abiding in Thiru-ch-chaththi-muttram!

Vol. IV d. 96. st. 1.

* * *

It is noteworthy that Sambandhar did not receive Thiruvadi-deekshai. He had no need to receive such a favour. He was an Iswara-koti, a free soul, who out of his own free will, out of compassion towards the world, chose to be born on earth. Sekkizhaar draws our attention to this special characteristic of Sambandhar which sets him apart not only from all men all over the world but from all saints all over the world.

Lord Civan replied: "Come to Nalloor." And to Nalloor Appar went.

He arrived at the temple of Lord Civan at alloor
exactly according to the good-increasing
gracious directive of the Lord;
and, when the sacred servitor of eternal fame
rose to his feet
after gladly paying obeisance to the Lord,
the Lord said:
"We will fulfil what is in your thoughts".
Saying so, Lord Civan adorned the head of Appar
with His blossomy feet.

Appar has recorded this unique favour in a decad, the first stanza of which is:

He further softened (the hearts of)
the devotees who melt thinking about Him;
He made evils affecting the devotees
depart without leaving a trace;
the angry rutting elephant's hide
He retained as His shawl;
The effulgent moon's young shoot
He wore on His head;
He placed well and truly on my head the sacred feet
which had been drenched by the honey
seeping from blossoming choice flowers
which the noted heaven-dwellers
had laboriously sought out,
kind by acceptable kind,
and had strung and set them
in the form of a chaplet
on His gem-set crown.

VI d. 14 st. 1.

From Nalioor, Appar proceeded on his pilgrimage, and arrived at a place called Thingaloor, where lived a great devotee called Appoothi Atikal. The Lord of Speech hearing that Appoothi Atikal, a Brahmana of high rank, had named his children, roads, wells, tanks, groves, booths where water was supplied to passers-by—all of them, with the name 'Thirunavukkarasu' went to his house. In the poem containing this information, (1466-201), Sekkizhaar

takes special trouble to say "Anthanarin mempatta Appoothi Atikalaar". Sekkizhaar never uses an unnecessary phrase or word. The above words are set in a poem which says that Appar wondered who could be the person who named a miscellany of things by his name. So the words, which in English mean "Among Brahmanas, a person of high rank, called Appoothi Atikalaar" gain significance. Did Appar wonder not merely at the idiosyncracy of naming things after him, but also of a person of high rank among Brahmanas of that place doing so?

Surprised at this unusual enthusiasm of a fan, Appar asked the by-standers the name of the person responsible for this exhibition of a fan's fancy towards a total stranger. The people directed him to the house of Appoothi. Appar went there, and after receiving the greetings due to a devotee of Lord Civan, Appar asked Appoothi how it was that instead of naming all his handi-work with his own name, he had given the name of "another person". Appoothi did not know who his guest was. Therefore, when Appar referred to Thirunaavukkarasar very slightly (as Appoothi thought), he flew into a rage and shouted, "How dare you call the great person who, by his sacred acts of service won over the King back to Caivism, 'another person'? He followed with another question. "May I know who you are?" When Appar with all humility revealed his identity, Appoothi was exceeding contrite for his rash words and invited Appar to his house for dinner. The lady of the house cooked with great enthusiasm and when the food was ready, bade her eldest son go into the garden and cut plantain leaves from the trees and bring them quickly to serve food on those leaves to the honoured guest and her husband, and, later on, to other members of the family.

The son said to himself,
 "I got this chance of doing this service
 on account of my good mother and father
 bidding me do so,"
 and, hurriedly rushed into the garden.
 When he was in the act of cutting a huge leaf,
 a shining snake, disturbed by him,
 bit him in his hand
 and made him faint and fall to the ground. 1806-24.



Flinging away from his hand
 the snake with the poison bag
 which had encircled his hand
 and had already made his eyes burn
 with the virulence of its poison,
 he became agitated,
 and, saying to himself,
 "Before I fall down
 by the cruel speed of the poison
 of the fangs of the snake,
 I shall go and hand over
 the leaf I have plucked,"
 he ran back home.

* * *

Out-running the speed of the cruel poison,
 as he approached the house,
 he decided:
 "I shall not disclose to anyone
 the snake having got hold of my hand,
 lest the news should stand in the way
 of the man of rare Thavam dining in our house."

* * *

As the poison ascended to the head and reached its peak effect,
 his teeth, eyes and body became black as if scorched by a fire, his
 speech became indistinct. Even as he was falling to the ground
 while his life ebbed away, he left by the side of his mother the leaf
 to be used as an eating plate and fell down to the ground.

Seeing the fainting son, the mother and father became agitated
 and, after carefully looking at him, came to the conclusion that he
 had died of a snake-bite. Without any perturbation, they set
 about planning the feeding of the servant of the Lord. Sekkizhaar
 relates:

They placed the rare-to-beget son on a mat,
 and, covering him up,
 hid him on one side of the courtyard in the back,
 and said to each other,
 "We shall feed the guest
 without in any way letting this matter
 becoming known to anyone."
 So deciding, they hurried forward
 towards the devotee of great intuition
 and greater divine initiative.

* * *

They hurried towards him, and saying:
 "It is getting late for your dinner",
 they served the rice and the curries
 in an attractive manner,
 and then, prostrating on the ground before the devotee,
 and rising therefrom,
 said:
 "Please be gracious enough to dine
 and honour our entire family."
 Hearing them say so,

1812-30

* * *

The devotee rose and washed his rosy feet,
 then mounted and seated himself
 on another seat;
 and, pausing while the dinner leaf plate
 was cleaned ceremoniously,
 smeared himself with the white sacred ash.
 And, after offering, as is fitting,
 the sacred ash to the two
 who were in the nature of hosts,
 while he was in the act
 of giving the sacred ash to the children,

19813-31.

* * *

he looked at Appoothiyaar
 of the standard of truth
 prescribed by the original Four Vedas,
 and said:
 "Show me the Seemanta-puthran—
 the son born out of the first conception—
 who is elder to these
 so that I may adorn him
 with the worthy sacred ash".
 On his saying so,
 Appoothiyaar would not say anything
 about the happening,
 but said:
 "Just now, here, he will not be of any avail!" 1814-22.

* * *

On hearing those words,
 by the grace of the Lord with the beautiful eyes,
 there appeared an apprehension
 in the compassionate heart of Appar, our devotee,

and he said:

"This reply my heart does not accept;
What has he done?
If there is anything special,
tell me the truth in detail."

1815-33

* * *

On one side, though he was reluctant to reply,
lest he should lose the blessing
of the great man dining in his home,
yet, forced by the noble trait of character
of the obligation to tell openly the truth
when the man of Thavam questioned him,
with grieving heart,
he bowed down to him sadly,
and related what had happened to his son. 1816-34.

* * *

Naavukkarasar, on hearing this, exclaimed;

"Remarkable indeed is the way you have acted!
Who else would have done like this!"
and

rose from his seat,
went forward,
and, looking at the lifeless corpse,
sang a decad of sweet musical song
that the Lord might bestow His grace,
and

the snake's poison be got rid of.

1817-35.

* * *

On this occasion, Appar sang a decad, which seems to us like
the reference in a boxing match, counting one to ten in a ringing
voice to enable a knocked-out boxer to rise before the 'ten' was
spoken.

He sang:

One is His Kailas mountain
taller than one's mind can think of;
One is the moon high up in the sky
which He wears;
One is the bleached skull in his hand
in which people drop their alms;
One is His Mount.

1

* * *

Two are His feet
 which the heaven-dwellers worship;
 Two are the ring and roll of a strip of palm-leaf
 on His ears
 which distinguish the male and the female;
 Two are His forms—
 the Formless and the one with Form;
 Two are the small deer and the mace
 which sought shelter with Him.

* * *

Three are the eyes on His forehead;
 Three are the prongs
 of His flesh-infested lance;
 Three are in number,
 His arrow, bow, and bow-string;
 Three are the fortresses
 they were aimed at.

* * *

Four are His faces;
 Four are the sources of birth
 designed by Him—
 (the egg, the sweat, the earth, the uterus);
 Four are the feet of His mount;
 Four are the Vedas He sang.

* * *

Five are the hoods of the snakes
 which swing on His body;
 Five are the senses
 which He conquers (in His devotees);
 Five are the arrows of him
 Who incurred His anger;
 Five are the articles He bathes in.

* * *

Six are the Appendices He created
 for the Vedas;
 Six are the faces of His son;
 Six are the legs of the bees
 hovering over His garland of flowers;
 Six are the flavours of the foods He created.

* * *

Seven are the aeons He created;
 Seven are the great seas He founded;
 Seven are the worlds He rules over;
 Seven are the notes of music He designed.

* * *

Eight are His eternal great qualities;
 Eight are the varieties of flowers worn by Him;
 Eight are His shoulders;
 Eight are the cardinal points He created.

* * *

Nine are the gates (of ingress and egress)
 He designed for the body of man;
 Nine are the strands of the thread on His chest;
 Nine are the varieties of hair-do
 He favours;
 Nine are the sections into which
 He divided the earth.

* * *

Ten are the eyes (on the five hoods) of His snake;
 Ten its close-set fangs;
 Ten are the heads of Raavana
 who was the object of His anger;
 Ten are the devotional acts
 of the servitors of God.

IV d. 18 st. 1 to 10.

* * *

On the evil poison leaving him,
 the resurrected-to-life son
 of the holy Brahmana,
 rose up like one hurriedly waking up
 on the departure of a sleep
 which had inexplicably come upon him,
 and bowed at the flowery feet
 of Thirunaavukkarasar
 who had been enslaved
 by Him who rides on the bull.
 Seeing him do so, Appar graciously gave him
 the sacred ash to wear.

1818-36.

* * *



All those who saw the boy gain the life which had left him, praised the glory of the Path of Service to God. Those who begot the boy, and now stood nearby, grieved a little in their hearts for this child having been an obstacle to the dining of the devotee of rare greatness at their house. Seeing their dejection, Appar re-entered their house and showed his disposition to dine with them. He then dined in the house insisting on Appoothiyaar and his sons joining him in the dinner. Later, Appar spent some days with that family and then continued his pilgrimage towards Thillai.

Apart from Appar's collaboration with Sambandhar in the great task of putting an end to the tyranny of the Jain monks and the King who had fallen a victim to their viles, this incident of the relationship with Appoothiyaar is the most important incident in his life.

At Thiru-p-pazhanam, he sang a decad in Nayaka-nayaki role, the role of the Bride and the Bridegroom, the bride being Appar, and the bridegroom, the Lord.

He sang:

O Flock of Kuyils
 who practise the garland of words!
 Would He of Pazhanam,
 where several swarms of striped bees
 sing tuneful songs,
 would He of the head on the crown of which
 the budding moon shines brightly at twilight,
 spurn my virgin charms? IV d. 12. st. 1.

*

*

*

We cannot follow Appar from pilgrimage centre to pilgrimage centre. On his way to Thiruvaaroor, he stopped at Palayaarai to worship Lord Civan abiding in the temple thereat.

Thiruvaaroor had a fascination for all the three Samaya-Kuravars whose biographies have been written by Sekkizhaar. But Manikkavaachakar never visited Thiruvaaroor though uncritical editors of the Thiruvaachakam describe one poem as sung at Thiruvaaroor. To Manikkavaachakar Thillai had the greatest fascination. Out of 51 decades of his Thiruvaachakam, he sang as many as 29 at Thillai.

At Thiruvaaroor, Appar sang as many as 19 decades, that is to say, those which have come down to us. Of these two are quite famous. He sang:

Instead of worshipping the feet of Him
 with His body smeared all over
 by the white ash,
 and believing that I would be redeemed,
 I carried the Uri
 (a ring of twisted straw
 to seat a pot of rice or other food-stuff
 and held in the hand by four strings
 tied to the ring,
 and usually carried by Jain monks)
 and wandered about,
 and
 abandoned worshipping with my hands

and with heart-felt ardour
 the Lord of Aaroor
 where the Kuyil calls in the grove
 whose flowers are so plenty
 that they are not plucked,
 and where the peacock dances about.
 Thus while a ripe fruit was available
 I became a fellow who stole the unripe fruit.

IV. d. 5 st. 1-5.

* * *

This decad is famous for each stanza ending with a well-known proverb. The proverb used in the above stanza is one found in Thiruvalluvar's Thirukkural. He asked, "Why use harsh words when sweet words are available? It looks like coveting sour fruit when a sweet one is available."

The decad is noteworthy but more noteworthy is Appar's condition of body and mind when he sang the song. Sekkizhaar describes thus:

A sacred frame of body
 on which was running a stream of water
 which was the rain of tears
 drenching the chest;
 garlands of sweet Tamil
 strung by a sacred mouth
 whose lips joined and parted
 to string them;
 a sacred mind
 which had leaned for support
 on the perfect golden feet;
 the hoe, a unique tool carried by him;
 composed by these components
 and with the welfare of the world
 as his objective,
 he went about cleaning the sacred streets,
 all the while humbly paying obeisance to the Lord
 and singing His praises. 1490-225

* * *

From Thiruppukaloor to Thirumaraikkaadu Appar and Sambandhar travelled together visiting as many as nearly three dozen shrines.

Appar, continuing his tour of shrines of Lord Civan arrived at Thiruppukaloor. This was Appar's first visit to this place. Just about that time, Sambandhar, who had arrived at Thiruppukaloor in his fifth tour of pilgrimage centres of shrines of Lord Civan, was staying with Saint Murukanaar. Hearing that Appar was on his way to Thiruppukaloor after his visit to Aaroor, he decided to wait for him. In due course they met. This was a historic meeting. For Appar and Sambandhar began to visit shrines of Lord Civan in each other's company only after this meeting, and it was during this close period of companionship that Appar briefed Sambandhar exhaustively about the atrocities of the Jain monks, and of the Kings who were puppets in their hands. Sekkizhaar has a very poetic stanza about this meeting. He sings:

Hearing about the ardour
 with which the Prince of Kaazhi—
 which was full of big ponds
 which were full of water-crows—
 was coming in his direction,
 Vaakeesar, the Lord of Speech, Appar,
 who was coming towards Pukaloor
 with rushing waters which brought with them
 precious stones,
 arrived there with delight.
 When the great throngs of sacred-ash-smeared devotees
 of both sides mingled together,
 it seemed as if two seas of moonlight
 had become one.

1498-233.

* * *

Appar went to bed at Thirumaraikkaadu with an uneasy mind after having watched the long long since closed doors of the temple in that shrine open with great difficulty and delay to his long decad of eleven stanzas, and, later on, close shut with a bang even before the strains of the last line of the very first stanza of the decad sung by Sambandhañ had ceased to ring in the ears of Appar.

In his dream that night, he heard Lord Civan say "Vaaimooril irruppom; thodara vaa", "Follow us to Vaaimoor. We will be there". And to Vaaimoor Appar followed the Lord. Hearing about the sudden departure of Appar, Sambandhar too followed. And, while they were watching the Lord, He pointed out a temple and, disappeared within it. The Lord thus graciously bestowed on

them a vision of Himself, and, after witnessing this great spectacle both of them returned to MaraiKKaadu.

Appar and Sambandhar parted company at Thirumaraikkaadu, and while Sambandhar went towards Madurai, Appar continued his tour of shrines of Tamilnadu. In due course, he came to Pazhayaarai, his second visit to that place.

Arriving at Pazhaiyaarai
of the Lord of russet locks,
as he was passing along,
by force of habit,
he worshipped with joined palms
Lord Civan abiding at the Northern Temple
which (he did not know that)
the deluded Jain Monks had walled up.
On noting this,
and on hearing that this was now
a false cupola of a Jain temple,
unable to bear the news,
was sore hurt in his heart.

1559-294.

* * *

Approaching a place close to that cupola,
he meditated on the rosy feet of the Lord
with a crown on which fragrant Kondrai flowers
were diffusing their fragrance,
and humbly remained saying:
“Do away with the perfidious act
deceitfully done by the Jain monks
and destroy the power
of the power-drunk Jain monks”!

1560-295.

* * *

“Without seeing Your form
and without worshipping You,
I shall not leave this place”
Saying so, the King of Speech,
intent on achieving his intention,
remained there without taking any food.
The Lord, realising this,
and, intent on making the king
yield to the King of Speech,
graciously but sternly bade the king
thus in his dream.

1561-296.

* * *

"On the witless Jain monks hiding Us,
 We are here," said the Lord,
 and gave the king directions
 and landmarks to find Him.
 Doing so, He graciously commanded the king:
 "That Arasu may worship Us,
 remove the obstacle."
 The king woke up with his wits on the alert,
 and, holding over his head his joined palms,
 praised the Lord.

1562-297.

* * *

The astonishing vision he saw,
 he communicated to his ministers,
 and arrived at the spot along with them.
 Finding out the place
 by the landmarks given by the Lord,
 the king worshipped the feet
 of the great resplendent servitor of the Lord. 1562-298.

* * *

The King restored the walled-up temple to its original state,
 and Appar duly worshipped the Lord and broke his fast.

Appar left Pazhaiyaarai and, after visiting Thiruaanaikkaa
 and other shrines, crossed the Cauvery and arrived at Thiruppain-
 geeli.

On his way to Thiruppaingeeli
 he became very wearied,
 and on thirst for water
 along with hunger assailing him,
 he went forward
 undistracted in mind by these.
 The Lord with a forehead bearing an eye,
 abiding in Paingeeli
 girt by beauty-abounding groves
 intent on relieving the suffering of His servitor,

* * *

1569-304.

Grove and tank He first created,
 then turning Himself
 into a way-showing guide,
 He appeared before the unique King of Speech
 in the form of a Brahmana
 adorned with the sacred ash,

bearing in his hands
 the desired-for bundle of rice
 and awaited His pleasure.
 Thus acted He
 who was impossible of being seen
 by the Bird riding the skies
 and the unique Boar
 tearing into the bowels of the earth. 1570-305.

* * *

Appar now set out on the last but two phases of his tour of pilgrimage centres of Lord Civan. He went northwards and outside the boundaries of Tamilnaadu into Andhrapradesh and Karnataka with resolve to reach the Kailasa Mountain and have a darsan of Lord Civan.

He avoided the Dandakaaranya forest, went westwards right upto the coast of Mangalore to pay obeisance to Lord Civan abiding in a temple at a place calle Gokarnam, meaning The Ear of a Cow. Proceeding towards Kailasa, he went on foot, he crawled on all fours, finally he edged himself forward inch by inch on his bare. chest till it was a bleeding mass of shredded flesh and bared rib-cage. Lord Civan appeared before him in the guise of an aged Brahmana and advised him to dive into a pond nearby and rise out of a well in far off Thiruvaiyaaru in Tamilnadu, about 12 kilometres from Thanjavoor.

Appar dived into the pond without hesitation and rose out of the well in Thiruvaiyaaru. From the shores of the well, Appar went into the temple of Lord Civan. He was overtaken by representatives of all creation which moved on in pairs.

He sings:

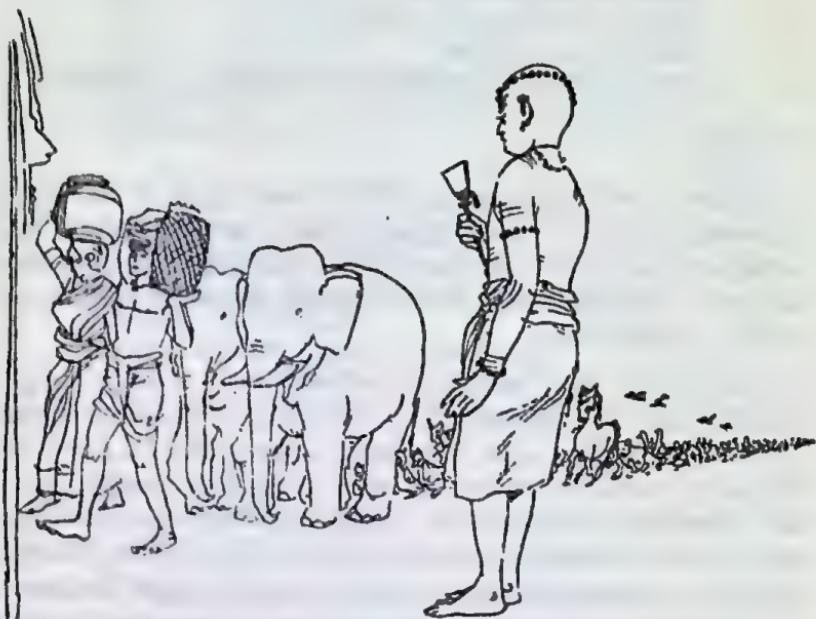
He with a chaplet
 of beautiful crescent moon,
 and She, the daughter of the Mountain King,
 singing of them
 and bearing in their hands
 just-about-to blossom flowers, and water as well,
 enter devotees adoring them;
 I followed after them.
 When I reached Aiyaaru
 without leaving a trace of my foot-mark anywhere,

along with the loved timid female elephant
I saw the male elephant come along.

Saw I His holy feet,

Saw I what I have never seen or known before!

IV d. 3 st. 1.



* * *

Appar had seen elephants and other creatures many times in the past. But he saw them as the respective animals, and their foot-prints as just as those of such creatures. But now he saw the same scene, but their foot-prints were no longer the foot-prints of such creatures; they were Lord Civan's holy foot-prints. The creatures were Lord Civan Himself. The vision of Lord Civan and Uma which was denied to him at Kailasa was today bestowed on him in the Kaleidoscopic variety, a Viswa-roopa darsanam.

Thus he saw all creation, the pheasant and its hen, the male Kuyil and its mate, the cock and the hen, peahen and the peacock, the andril, a kind of bird, the boar of thundrous voice and the sow, the monkey with its black tuft of hair and its female, the male crane and its mate, the parrot and its mate, the cow and the bull. He saw them all in two ways; discriminatively as separate entities and species, but collectively as God Himself. That is the reason

why he sings that he saw what he had never seen or known before. He saw God everywhere and nothing but God.

From Thiruvaiyaar, after visiting two shrines, he arrived at Thiru-p-poon-thuruththi, where he built a Mutt which is said to be in ruins today. This place is quite close to Thiruvaiyaaru, and a little more than a kilometre and a half from Thiruneiththaanam, now corrupted to the name of Thillaisthaanam, where the River Cauvery runs close to the main road.

At Thiruththuruththi, Sambandhar returning laden with glory after overthrowing the malign influence of Jainism in Paandinaadu, and Appar returning from his glorious visit to Kailasa Mountain met each other. This was the third and last time the two met. Appar, the very embodiment of humility, a humility born out of strength and not out of weakness, silently and unobserved by anyone, joined the crowd surrounding Sambandhar's palanquin and put his shoulder to the pole of the palanquin along with others and carried it along.

Appar unobservedly and unassumingly bore the palanquin on his weak shoulders of over fifty winters. But Sambandhar who had heard that Appar was in town anxiously enquired, "Where is Appar?"—to which Appar replied, "Here am I." The Wisdom of Lao Tse has the following passage:

Chengk aofu (the tenth generation ancestor of Confucius) left the following inscription: "On my first promotion, I bent my head. On my second promotion, I bent from my waist. On my third promotion, I prostrated myself. I walked close to the walls on the side of the street and no one dared to insult me." As for the common man: "They begin to swagger on their first promotion. On their second promotion, they begin to dance on the wagon. On their third promotion, they begin to call themselves the elders."

Compare Appar's three meetings with Sambandhar. On the first occasion, Appar, a man of forty-five or more, prostrated himself at the feet of a child of seven who lifted him up with his blossomy hands. At the second meeting at Thirupukaloor, when Appar met Sambandhar, Appar

vied with Sambandhar to gain the credit of being the first to prostrate at the feet of Sambandhar. At the third and last meeting at Thiruththuraippoondi, on Sambandhar's triumphant return from uprooting Jainism from Paandinaadu, Appar slipped into the crowd of devotees and put a shoulder, frail as it was, to the pole of the palanquin on which Sambandhar was riding. Each successive occasion excelled the other in the degree of humility, and with each prostration Appar rose in moral and spiritual stature.

Appar heard with great interest and greater joy the momentous details of Sambandhar's victory over the power of the Jain monks over the King and people of Paandinaadu. Later they parted, never to meet again.

It was at Thiruppoonthuruththi that Appar sang his famous song commanding limb by limb of his body to worship Lord Civan, each in its own way. Here is the song.

O Head of mine!
 Bow down to the Head (of all the universe)
 who, wearing a chaplet of heads on His head
 receives alms in a head;
 O Head of mine! bow down to Him.,

* * *

O Eyes of mine! Behold Him—
 with the throat
 which swallowed the sea-spawned poison—
 the Lord who eternally dances
 swinging rhythmically His eight arms;
 O Eyes of mine! Behold Him.

* * *

O Ears of mine! Listen always
 to the heroic exploits of Civan, our King,
 the Lord with a body
 of the hue of red coral-like flame;
 O Ears of mine! listen!
 O Nose of mine! Inhale the fragrance
 of the cremation-ground-dwelling Lord with three eyes,
 the spouse of the Devi
 who hangs upon His words;
 O Nose of mine! Inhale His fragrance.

* * *

O Mouth of mine! note that you praise the Lord,
who, donning the hide of the rutting elephant,
dances in the cremation-ground
where dwell the ghouls;
O Mouth of mine, note that you praise Him.

* * *

O Heart of mine! Meditate on the Immaculate One
with the up-standing golden locks,
the spouse of the Devi,
daughter of the cloud-capped Mount;
O Heart of mine! Meditate on Him.

* * *

O Hands of mine! Join together
and worship the Transcendent Being—
who has as a waist-band a snake
with the poisonous mouth—
and strewn at His feet are
large quantities of fragrant flowers;
O Hands of mine! Join together and worship Him.

* * *

Of what profit is this body to me—
this body which does not walk
clock-wise round Haran's temple
and, lavishly strewing flowers with the hand,
does not cry out, "Obeisance to You"?
Of what profit is this body to me?.....

* * *

Appar now set out on the second phase of his last tour of Civan's shrines, and proceeded first to Madurai which no longer held any terrors for him. From thence to Rameswaram, and back to Thiruppukaloor. After a hurried visit to Thiruvaaroor, Appar returned once again to Thiruppukaloor.

Here Appar sang many many decades, and abode happily for a long time serving the Lord in his very special manner of ridding the precincts of the temple of the Lord of the weeds and thorny shrubs and flints and stones on the pathway.

Once, while he was thus engaged in his loving task of hoeing the grounds of the temple, occurred an experience. Appar

was given a final test out of which he came out with glorious victory.

While he was engaged thus in his special service, Lord Civan set an ordeal to Appar, not so much to test him as to show to the world how devoid of desire Appar was. Extirpation of desire is the last and indispensable discipline which an aspirant has to acquire before he can be blest with Mukti. It is to be remembered that the chapter on this discipline follows, in the Thirukkural, the chapter on the Apprehension of the Real. For, a human being, in the very nature of things, has to attach himself to something or other. If he has to give up one attachment he must take up another attachment. It is for this reason that Thiruvalluvar said:

**"Take up attachment to Him without attachments;
hold on to that Attachment
in order to leave (other) attachments"**

The Lord willed that, wherever the hoe of Appar penetrated, gems and gold should come up along with the dirt and grit. Thus when, along with the rolling grit, gems and pellets of gold rolled out, Appar took them up on his hoe and flung them along with the dirt into a neighbouring well filled with fragrant lotus flowers.

Thereupon, in front of our saint,
who had arrived at a staunch state of mind
of not differentiating between grass and grit
and gold and gems,
there descended from the sky
by the holy will of the Lord
abiding in Thirupukaloor
lovely dames with foreheads
resembling strung bows.

They danced, sang,
rained a shower of flowers on him,
approached him as if they would embrace him,
and with coiled tresses come unstuck,
and swaying hips,
ran away from him.

They returned again along with Cupid
and strolled about with light of lust in their eyes,
or stood confronting him
with dishevelled dress.

Appar with his mind bent on the work in hand remained unmoved by all these blandishments. The heavenly dancers, finding him no prey to their wiles, departed after paying homage to him.

Appar, who had come unscathed by the ordeal, spent some more days there. Then, urged by a growing longing to reach the haven of the feet of the Lord, he sang:

Thinker as I am,
what shall I think about
unless I think
only of the holy feet of our Lord;
other Succour than You I have not.
Unless, with folded palms,
I see nothing but your anklet-girt feet,
I am a blind person.
O Lord who provided
nine exits in one structure!
When they are closed all at once and at the same time,
I may not feel this same way;
therefore O Virtuous One.
here and now,
to Your feet I am coming,
O Virtuous One abiding in Poompukaloor!

* * * *

And forthwith Appar abandoned this body, and, for ever and ever, was seated at the feet of the Great One.

* * * *

Appar's motto and ideal of life was "service", humble service. The hoe he carried represented this ideal. In one place he sang his credo thus:

"My duty is to serve and rest content". When Sekkizhaar sang his "Glory of the Galaxy of the Sacred Servitors of God" he must have had Appar in his mind. The following verses cannot but be taken to have been sung with Appar in mind, if not in memory of Appar.

Endowed with eternal riches
which never wax or wane,
they shone with resolve which with welling love
sought only to adore,
and sought not deliverance at all.

* * *

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
 their duty none other but God's Service
 Full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing;
 How can I describe their resoluteness?

* * *

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
 Unique servitors of the Dancing Lord,
 Men of age-long fame; how shall I
 here praise or sing their state?

* * *

The best of literary compositions come out of a burdened heart, burdened with love, burdened with misery and unhappiness. And Appar's heart was such a one. Therefore, it is no wonder that his songs come to the memory of the common man more often than those of Sambandhar, and that his songs give the common man hope and inspiration. In the whole vast library of devotional works, there is none to compare with the Thiruth-thaandakams of Appar. Not that his Kurunthokais, or the volume of songs set to the music of various puns (tunes) are in any way less in merit. But the Thiruthi-thaandakams are a class by themselves.

4. A COMPASSIONATE COWHERD

"Servitor to the Servitors
of our Lord Thirumoolan am I"
sang Sundarar.

The Lord who entered the body of the tender
of the herd of cows of Saatthanoor
of long established families;
he who praised in perfect Tamil
the Lord with a sickle-moon on His head
exactly as in the words of the Vedas
eternally prevailing on earth;

He who made his feet rest on my head,
He is the compassionate-eyed one called Moolan.

—Nambi-aandaar-nambi.

A Brahmana Yogi set out from the Kailasa Mountain to pay a visit to his friend and Guru-bhai, the dwarfish sage, Agasthiyar, in the Pothiya mountain range in the South. He was, what Rama-krishna Paramabamsa calls, an Isvarakoti—a realised soul, a soul which had gained integration with the Godhead. His return to the world was not as a result of past Karma. Of his own choice, filled with great compassion for erring humanity, he came down from the presence of God where he had been enjoying bliss of union with the Godhead.



In the south, on his way to the Pothiya-malai, he reached one day, at dusk, the outskirts of a village called Saaththanoor. There he found a herd of cows lowing miserably round the dead body of their cowherd. Aseetic as he was, whose chief characteristic is, according to Thiruvalluvar, compassion to each and every creature on earth, he abandoned his body by virtue of Yogic powers and entered the body of the dead cowherd, and, forthwith that corpse became alive to the delight of the miserable cows. The ascetic in cowherd's skin took them back to the villagers who were beginning to get worried about their cattle. He returned to the spot where he had left his own body and found that it had disappeared. This was an act of grace of Lord Civan. So, he continued to remain in the cowherd's body, and was soon immersed in Tapas (contemplation of God) under a sacred Peepal tree in Thiruvaavāduthurai, a neighbouring Caivaite centre.

Dr. Srinivasa Iyengar sings!

Leaving his Himalayan retreat
Some fifteen hundred years ago
He went in quest of the Southern Sage.

* * *

Many and many a year he covered
The spaces of the continent
And saw spread out a motley world.

* * *

Beneath that manifold variety
He saw a common humanity,
The 'Mother's children all.

* * *

Eighteen languages they spoke.
Yet he read in all of them
The same thought, feelings, images.

* * *

At last one evening he found himself
Where crowding cattle made deep moan
For the beloved cowherd stricken dead.

* * *

Steeled against the shocks of time,
But this rude impact of pain
Released the submerged springs within.

* * *

Coerced by force of pity
He left his holy tenement
To inhabit the prostrate form.

* * *

As the cowherd leapt into life anew,
The cattle wildly danced for joy
And led him briskly home.
But the waiting anxious cowherdess
Was seized with nameless terror
When he turned his eyes away.
The rejected wife bewailed her lot,
Went round, and asked the elders
To intercede on her behalf.

* * *

At length they made report to her:
"A great effulgence sits on Moolan.
He will be a man apart, a star."

* * *

Anon returning to the woods
He searched for his habitual shell
But couldn't find it anywhere.

* * *

He had perforce to continue
In cowherd Moolan's cast-off frame;
And did it matter, after all?

* * *

In the deeps of the forest
 Moolan sat in meditation
 And saw the Sunrise of Self.

* * *

Soon disciples flocked to him
 And now and then he spoke a verse
 And these became three thousand.

* * *

Defying the march of Time
 And the breaking and making of nations
 His Tirumandiram abides with us still.

* * *

According to the traditional lore, which Sekkizhaar unquestioningly repeats in his chronicle, Thirumoolar is said to have lived for over three thousand years, being engaged all the time in Yogic contemplation, and coming out of the trance once a year to compose one verse of his magnum opus, the Thirumandiram of 3000 and odd stanzas. Scholars, however, now place him in the fifth century A.D. They also believe that several of the verses in his work are interpolations, but as it is difficult to separate the chaff from the grain, the world of Tamil scholars has accepted all the 3000 odd stanzas as Thirumoolar's own work.

He had a mission to perform. The intended visit to Agasthiyar was only an excuse. He himself proclaims his mission. Placing on record his own biography, he sings:

On my head Nandi's twin feet I bore,
 them I installed in the core of my mind,
 and, paying obeisance thereunto,
 I meditated daily on the feet of Haran,
 and (now) venture the Aagamas to expound. Tm. 173

* * *

O Moolaangan! This is the reason I came here.
 I came to expound the Vedas of noble parts
 which were originally uttered
 during the dance (of Civan)
 with the Lady of blue-tinted body,
 the bejewelled Dame.

Tm. 77

* * *

Those who had not performed well-practised Thavam
in former birth,
what use is it to them to gain a birth later?
Me perfectly the Lord created
that I may perfectly expound Him in Tamil. Tm. 81

* * *

These songs appear in what is called the Paayiram or Preface by the author. Authors write books for various reasons, the most common one being to display one's own erudition, but there has been none who wrote his work for the reason for which Thirumoolar wrote the Thirumanthiram. He discloses it in this unique poem:

The bliss I gained may the world gain.
Let me explain how.
On one taking recourse more and more
to the Manthiram, the Mystic Word—
Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya, the Five Letters,
and experiencing It in every fibre of the body,
the heaven-dwelling content of the Vedas,
will of Its own accord reveal Itself.

Tm. 85.

* * *

This stanza is a classic example of how difficult are the verses of Thirumanthiram even when they are composed in simple and unambiguous Tamil words.

The original verse is given below in transliteration.

Naan pettra inbam peruka iv vaiyakam.
Vaan pattiri nindra marrai-p-porul, solidin,
Oon-pattri nindra unarvu urru manthiram
Thaan-pattra-p-pattra-th-thalai-p-padum thaane!

“The bliss I gained, may this world gain.” Books are written by common people to show off their erudition, to gain fame or profit but rarely with the unique, noble purpose of Thirumoolar. In doing so, he was only conforming to the ideal laid down for books in Tamil Grammar. It is that a book should gain for its reader the four desiderata of life—Righteous Living, Wealth, Bliss and Mukti. This was also the motto of the ancient saints of Tamilnadu. Thirunaavukkarasar declared: “My duty is to serve.”

Thirumoolar's long work of 3000 and odd stanzas has few students in Tamilnadu. But any Tamilian, who has merely turned the pages of the huge tome but once or for that matter, or has merely attended one discourse on that author and his work, will be familiar with two of his profound sayings.

He proclaimed:

"Ondre Kulam, oruvane Theivam"
One is the race, one, indeed, is God.

Thirumoolar is also famous for another revolutionary thought. He declared:

"Anbe Civam."
Love, indeed, is God.

It would not be altogether incorrect to say that the Thirumanthiram has been a work of academic interest as against the first eight Thirumurais, which have entered each home and hamlet and have become part of the stream of life of the Tamil people. It is interesting to note that the author of Civagnaana-siddhiyaar, the second greatest of the Caivaite Sastra-s, has not made even a single reference to the Thirumanthiram.

Yet, the fact remains that the Thirumanthiram has been included in the Thirumurais, the other eleven of which are pure devotional works. One verse in the Thirumanthiram is quoted in Meikandaar's Civa-gnaana-bhodham. That verse is:

Out of the three called,
Pathi, Pasu, Paasam,
like Pathi, Pasu and paasam
too are beginningless;
Pasu and Paasam cannot approach (afflict) Pathi,
but if Pathi approaches them,
Pasu, and Paasam will not last at all.

*

*

*

The Thirumanthiram is divided into nine sections called Thanthirams. The methods of worship are three; Manthiram, Thanthiram, and Yanthiram. The Lalita Sahasra-naamaaval—the thousand names of Lalita (Sakthi)—has these two sets of three names for Her:

Sarva-manthra-sva-roopini
 sarva-yanthraatmikaa,
 sarva-tanthra-roopaa.

* * *

maha-a-tanthraa,
 maha-a-manthraa,
 maha-a-yanthraa.

* * *

Broadly speaking Manthiram is the word of worship, Thanthiram is the mode of worship, Yanthiram is the symbol or instrument of worship. The most well known Yanthiram is the Sri Chakra.

Thirumanthiram is divided into nine Thanthirams or sections. These sections are preceded by the Paayiram of nine chapters and 112 stanzas. Paayiram can be generally rendered as Foreword.

The first chapter of 50 stanzas is devoted to praise of God. He affirms in the opening verse that God is one. Yet, He is many too.

One indeed is He, with His Mercy two He is;
 He is in the three;
 through the Four, He instructed the world;
 the five He conquered;
 in the six He expanded;
 He transcended the seventh;
 and He abode
 manifesting Himself as the eighth.

* * *

The most acceptable interpretation of these numbers seems to be:

- (a) Mercy—Sakti, the dynamic power inherent in Civan and exhibited when necessary, for instance, to create, sustain, and dissolve. Civan and Sakti are the two.
- (b) The three—the Guru, the Lingam which is the amorphous representation of Civan, and Sangam, i.e., the devotees. Or, the term may stand for the formless state of God, form-invested state, and the amorphous state of formlessness and yet with form, like the Lingam.

- (c) The Four—the four Vedas.
- (d) The Five—the five sense organs.
- (e) The six—the six centres or Aadhaarams.
- (f) The seven—the Sahasradalam or thousand-petalled lotus.
- (g) The eight—the five elements, sun, moon, and the soul.

* * *

Who is the God? Thirumoolar answers:

I am talking of
the Pure One who abides eternally
in the soul dear to Him
which pays obeisance to Him,
the Lord of the four cardinal points
and of the good Devi,
Him who kicked the Lord of Death
the sole king of one out of the above directions—
the southern direction.

* * *

Peerless is He, asserts Moolar:
Civan's equal no God there is;
search howsoever much you like,
nor anyone here is equal to Him,
the Lord with the crown of fiery red matted locks
and lotus-like feet
who transcended the universe that day.

* * *

God is the embodiment of mercy, of compassion, of love, though to self-centred mortals some of His actions may seem the anti-thesis of mercy. Thirumoolar expounds this truth in the following poem:

More than fire, fiery is He,
more than water, cool is He,
nevertheless, no one fully understands
the mercy of God.
Aloof though He may be, He is benevolent,
close is He to devotees;
more than a mother,
tender-hearted is He,
the Lord of trailing matted locks
The two Kaayam-s, (musk and asafoetida)
though you may boil together,

the great fragrant musk's odour
 will eclipse the other;
 similarly, even if all the world join together
 and consider some one a God,
 it will not be equal
 to communion with Isan.

17

* * *

He invites the people of the world to praise and worship Him,

The Father, Nandi,
 the unsatiating Ambrosia,
 the Peerless One,
 the Munificent Patron,
 the Primeval Lord of ages past,
 by whatever means you can,
 worship Him;
 if you worship Him,
 through that very means
 you can gain the grace of Isan.

36

* * *

I too shall steadfastly worship Nandi daily.
 He who stood (transcending the spheres)
 with a body resembling (a pillar of) fire,
 will come down from the heavens
 and, in the shape of profound gnosis,
 will, with pleasure, abide in my body,
 in the very core of my heart,
 and become my life-breath.

37

* * *

Adorn (my head with His feet) I will,
 deposit it will I in my heart,
 sing shall I (exultingly) calling on Him
 "Oh My Lord",
 worship Him will I,
 showering on Him variegated flowers,
 will dance,
 and dancing will go unto Him,
 acclaiming Him the Lord of the Immortals.
 This is what I have learnt today.

50

* * *

Thirumoolar's God is Civan, not the Rudran of the triad, Brahma Vishnu and Rudran. The Civan of Thirumoolar is none other than Brahman, the Transcendent Being, the Godhead.

The nine Thanthirams are said to be expositions of nine Aagamas. The Hindu Scriptures are broadly classified into the Veda and the Aagamas. The Vedas are said to be general scriptures and the Aagamas, special scriptures. The latter are held by Caiva Siddhaanthis as superior to the Vedas. The Aagamas are said to be 28 in number; it is also believed that the Aagamas which are available today are not the original Aagamas.

While some scholars are of the opinion that each section is an exposition of a particular Aagama, other scholars are of the opinion that such compartmentalisation is not correct, and that it will be more true to say that the nine sections treat the Aagamas in general.

Of these nine sections, the central one, the fifth, is said to be the life-nerve of the nine. It is said to expound the principles of Caiva-Siddhaantha. The preceding four expound the means by which a student of the Thirumanthiram makes himself fit to gain the gnosis of the Real, propounded in the fifth section. The last four sections describe the fruits one gains when he has gained gnosis of the Real, the Civam.

The Thanthirams and their Contents:

The first Thanthiram of 224 stanzas, (Kaarana Aagama), has 24 chapters and lays stress on the indispensable necessity of the aspirant for gnosis making himself fit externally and internally to receive such gnosis, and describes in a series of do-s and don't-s the means of so making oneself fit for the gnosis. Several of the subject-headings will remind the reader of chapters with similar headings in the Thirukkural and give the impression that the chapters are paraphrases of the terse verses of the Kural even as the stanzas of the Naaladiyaar are.

It will be pertinent to give the chapter headings of at least the first Thanthiram so that the reader gets a nodding acquaintance with the architectonics of the work. This Thanthiram may be said to broadly correspond to Yamam and Niyamam of

Patanjali's Ashtaanga Yoga— eight limbed Yoga, though it is not as exhaustive as those disciplines. Yamam comprises non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, not committing adultery and not going to prostitutes, compassion, not being perfidious, patience, imperturbability, moderate eating, cleanliness. Niyamam, comprises Thavam, contentment, faith in the existence of God, giving away one's wealth to deserving persons, respect for elders; listening to reading of books which will do permanent good to oneself, not being arrogant on grounds of caste, wealth, etc., discrimination of befitting conduct and unbefitting conduct, Japam, and keeping vows.

The following are the contents of the First Thanthiram

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Upadesam-(Initiation) | 14. Glory of Rain |
| 2. Impermanence of the body | 15. Glory of Giving |
| 3. Impermanence of wealth | 16. Characteristics of those who do charity |
| 4. Impermanence of youth | 17. Characteristics of those who do not do charity |
| 5. Impermanence of life | 18. Love |
| 6. Not killing | 19. Civan will recognise those who do acts of love |
| 7. Giving up eating meat | 20. Audio-education |
| 8. Not lustng after another's wife | 21. Learning |
| 9. Vileness of Prostitutes | 22. Illiteracy |
| 10. Poverty | 23. Impartiality |
| 11. Sacrificial fire | 24. Not drinking toddy. |
| 12. Conduct befitting Brahmanas | |
| 13. Duties of Kings | |

A section of Tamil scholars believe, on the authority of the last but one stanza, the 3046th of the Thirumanthiram, that besides the Thirumanthiram, there were two other works called 'Three Hundred Manthirams' and 'Thirty Upadesams.' No such works however, have been discovered so far.

The first chapter of the first Thanthiram is called 'Upadesam' that is 'Initiatory Precepts'. It comprises thirty stanzas. Broadly speaking it may be said that, in these thirty stanzas, Thirumoolar gives us an epitome of his massive work of 3000 and odd stanzas. The first stanza speaks of the descent of the soul on earth and the last stanza relates the ascent of the soul to heaven. The first stanza

is much more than a mere opening paragraph. In its all too few four lines, of sixteen feet, it condenses the whole epic of the soul's birth on earth and its redemption.

Bringing it down from the heavens,
providing it with a body befitting its Karma,
setting up His cool gracious feet
as its chief guard
from its very earliest times,
abiding within its body and melting it
(with love),
displaying to it through its eyes of gnosis
a matchless bliss,
He extirpated the verdigris.

1

* * *

The first two lines in this translation is a reference to the Panchaagni-vidya, 'The technique of the five fires.' On the onset of death, the gross body disintegrates through burial or burning — dust it was and to dust it had returned. The soul ascends to the heavens with its subtle body, with what is called the astral body in some circles. It stays there, and, in due course, reaches the earth through the rain-jets, pervades rice or other cereals, and when they turn into food it goes along with it into the stomach of a man, is transformed therein into semen, and is born (again) with a gross body on earth. These five stages are considered as five fires and the soul as the sacrificial offering, hence the term the Panchaagnividya or Five Fire Technique.

The soul, in its primeval state, exists with a taint of Aanava-malam. This is extirpated by the grace of God and the workings of Karma; the soul gains a state of pristine purity, no longer subject to the taint of Aanava-malam. In that state it gains union with the Godhead.

The following stanza may be said to be an epitome of the entire Thirumanthiram.

The verdigris our Nandi of eye on the forehead extirpated.
the verdigris He extirpated
by awakening in me the eye of gnosis;
that the verdigris may not draw near me again,
He showed me the radiant Effulgence,

and in the marble which is my heart
He, the Coral, set Himself.

The third stanza of Upadesam enunciates a cardinal dogma of Caiva-siddhanata.

Of the three called Pathi, Pasu, Paasam,
(God, soul, fetters)
like Pathi, Pasu and Paasam are beginningless;
Pasu and Paasam cannot affect Pathi,
but on the impact of Pathi
Pasu and Paasam cannot stand before Him.

* * *

The essential difference between Vedanta and Caiva-Siddhaantha is in the concepts of God, soul, Maayai, and Mukti. The soul is not a creation of God, much less is it of the essence of God. It is beginningless as God, and coeval with Him. It never loses its identity even in the state of union with the Godhead. Maayai is not the illusion of Advaita philosophy. It is the matrix of all matter. Bodies of creatures, the worlds and every other material thing is created out of it.

Nandi, our King,
who has taken abode in the temple called this body,
more solicitous than a mother,
getting rid of the three Malams
(taints of ignorance, deeds, and matter).
became (for me) a sun which rises
from the sea called compassion
even like the fire
which rises from the (rubbing together of) bamboos.

* * *

We may recall to mind that Manikkavaachakar also sang:

I thought to the exclusion of all other thought
about the nature of You who,
bestowing grace on me today,
and extirpating the darkness
(aanavamalam or ignorance)
rise in my heart like a sun.

* * *

In the third stanza of Upadesam and three others the gist of the twelve aphorisms of Civagnaana-bhodham, the first and parent canonical book of Caiva-Siddhaantha philosophy, can be seen.

The first stanza is this:

Of the three called Pathi, Pasu, Paasam,
like Pathi, Pasu and Paasam too are beginningless;
Pasu and Paasam cannot affect Pathi,
but, on the impact of Pathi.

Pasu and Paasam cannot stand before Him. Tm, 115

* * *

Pathi is God, Pasu is the soul. Paasam is the rope or fetters, i.e., the three taints or Malams which adhere to the soul even as verdigris adheres to copper. Thus, in the opinion of many, the above stanza has in it the gist or germ of the first three Sutras or aphorisms of Civagnaana-bodham which are:

V. 1. Since the world, grouped under the terms 'He' 'She', and 'It' is subject to the three incidents of creation, sustenance and destruction, it is certainly something created by some one. The group (He, She, It) disbecomes and, by reason of the Malam (taint of Aanavam, —darkness or ignorance) becomes. The Transcendent Being who is responsible for the disbecoming is also the Primal Being responsible for the becoming. Thus say the sages.

V. 2. When those creatures by reason of the twin deeds of good and evil are born and die, the Primal Being mingles with them and becomes verily them. Yet it does not coalesce with them but is only with them. It stands quite apart and all by itself. All these It does by its dynamic force, Sakti, from which It is never separated.

V. 3. Since one says: "It is not this, not this"; since he says: "My body," since there is something which knows things which happen (as for example in a dream) when the five sense-organs are dormant, since during deep sleep, there exists something without ingesting food and without action of any kind, since there is something

which understands when instructed—these go to prove that there exists a soul in this body which is made of matter.

It will be relevant to give here the other three stanzas (and the corresponding aphorisms) as well, though they do not belong to the First Section.

If one understands who and what his self (Soul) is,
no evil will come to the self;
without understanding the self,
he ruins himself;
after gaining the knowledge
by which one can understand himself,
worshipping the (Self in the) Self, he abides
(in peace). Tm. 2355

* * *

This is said to contain the gist or germ of aphorisms 4, 5, 6 which are:

V. 4. The soul is not one of the Antahkaranaṁs, i.e. internal instruments or tools of perception, viz., Manam, Chiththam, Buddhi, Ahankaaram, i.e., the mind, reason, intellect, and selfness or I-ness, as distinguished from the external tools of perception which are the five sense-organs viz. eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin. But the soul and the Antahkaranaṁs meet and join forces and act like a king and his ministers, since the soul, on account of its taint of Aanava malam (ignorance), cannot by itself perceive anything. Now, it has five states, viz., the wakeful state, the dream state, the deep sleep state, the Thureeya state of oneness with Brahman and the Thureeyaaatheetha state i.e., the state of transcendental bliss.

V. 5. Though the five sense-organs of the body (skin, mouth, eyes, nose and ears), each according to its capacity, perceives and comes to know the objects of the world through the senses (of touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing) by the help of the aforesaid soul, yet they cannot know the soul. Likewise, the soul cannot by its powers of perception know the grace of the unique One who actuates it. The five sense-organs in the presence of the soul and correspondingly the soul in the presence of the primal Being are merely like iron filings before a magnet.

V. 6. If we say that the aforesaid Primal Being is something which can be perceived by the sense-organs, It becomes an unreal thing. If (on the other hand) we say that It is something which cannot be perceived by any means, then It becomes a non-existent thing. Therefore, without falling into these two errors, the world of the learned people says that, in one way, It is something which cannot be perceived, and that, in another way, It is something which can be perceived.

Aphorisms, 7, 8, 9 are:

V. 7. Since all worldly objects will become naught before Reality, Reality cannot know unreality (the world and its objects). Since unreality has no wisdom (gnosis), it cannot know Reality. The soul which is neither real nor unreal (and is real-unreal) has two kinds of wisdom—one for knowing the worldly objects (through the medium of the sense-organs) and another for knowing Reality (on being suitably instructed by a Guru).

V. 8. On the Primal Being coming as a Guru, as a result of Thavam performed by the soul (in the past), and making the soul aware that it has forgotten its real self due to being brought up in the company of the five senses, it will leave them and, having no other refuge, will go towards the feet of Haran.

V. 7. Seek through gnosis the Godhead which cannot be realised by imperfect worldly knowledge. Eschew the world and attachment thereto verily as fallacious as the illusion of an unridable speeding chariot seen in a mirage. Then you will have the benign vision of the Lord.

(In order to gain the vision and to prevent it from fading away), meditate in the prescribed manner on the mystic five letters—Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya.

Their gist or germ, it is said, can be found in the following verse:

A personification of falsehood,
I was roaming about blabbering what came to mind;
God, however, eradicating root and branch
all the taints that dwelt in me,
and drawing me into Him,
exchanged me for Him; holding the scales even;
with rate of exchange at par,
was concluded the transaction.

Aphorisms 10, 11, 12 are:

V. 10. Let the soul, becoming one with Him by the method of Him verily becoming it (the soul), stand established in the service of the Lord; then there will no longer be Malams or Maayai or the potent Karma.

V. 11. Since, like the soul which shows things to the eyes with the power of vision and thereby, itself too sees things, the primeval Being likewise stands united with the soul and, showing objects to the soul and making it see them, Himself too sees them (in the process): the soul with unswerving love will reach the feet of Haran.

V. 12. (Through the help of gnosis), get rid of that (Aanava) Malam which prevents you from uniting with the lovely blossom-like yet strong feet of the Lord. Fraternise with the devotees of the Lord, who have apprehended the Godhead, and worship the guise of those who, to the detriment of delusion, are filled with 'Gneyam' (i.e. the known), and the temple too as verily Haran Himself.

Their gist or germ can be found in the following stanza:

Myself I did not know all this while,
myself when I had come to know,
I knew nothing apart from myself,
On my knowing my self,
and on my abiding in that knowledge,
the Lord, without abandoning me,
even for as much as it takes to wink,
He conducts an enquiry on me through me.

* * *

The Second Thanthiram (Kaanika Aagamam, 25 chapters, 212 stanzas) describes through means of Puraanic stories the benefits gained by those who have observed the disciplines, and the harm which come to those who have not done so.

The Third Thanthiram (Veera Aagamam, 21 chapters 335 stanzas) deals with the eight processes of Yoga, the benefits therefrom, the eight powers gained-thereby and the rule for the preservation and cherishing of the body which is the ground on which all these Yogic practices take place. Besides these, this section deals with various types of Yoga conducive to the well-being of the body.

In this section, Thirumoolar has given the death blow to the common belief, that the ascetics of India revile the body and consider it a thing of evil. Thirumoolar gives a place of honour to the body in the body of his work and records his conversion to the new point of view. He sings:

The body, formerly I held as a liability:
 (But when) within the body,
 the abiding Being I beheld,
 realising that the Noble One is enshrined in the body,
 I am earnestly cherishing the body. 725

* * *

If the Body decays, the Soul (too) will decay,
 and, certainly, he will not gain gnosis;
 I learnt the way of cherishing the body,
 I nurtured the body; (thereby) I nurtured the soul. 724.

* * *

The Fourth Section (Veera Aagamam, 13 chapters 535 stanzas) deals with what are called 'Chakra-s'. These will fall under the classification 'Yantra-s' of which mention was made earlier. These are diagrams engraved on copper or silver or gold plates with cabalistic letters which are said to have mystic powers. This Section deals with another subject which it will be proper to mention here. It is the 'Asapai' Mantram. 'Asapai' is the Tamil version of the Sanskrit word 'Ajapa'. 'Japa' means vocal repetition of a name of God or a Mantra with or without the aid of a rosary. 'Ajapa' means 'not vocally repeated.' There are three ways of repeating a Mantra. The most common way is to repeat it vocally, not necessarily loudly. The second is to repeat it without emitting a sound but, nevertheless, with movement of the lips and or rolling of the tongue within the closed mouth according to the needs of the pronunciation of the Mantra. The Thirumurukaatruppadi says that Brahmanas returning after a bath in the river with wet cloth wrapped on their bodies, incessantly repeat in this manner the Mantra—Sa-ra-va-na-bha-va—on their way back to their homes. There is a third kind of chanting the Mantra, a silent repetition of the Mantra. In this case, the incoming breath and outgoing breath take the place of the oral or mumbled

chanting. So'ham is a Mantra so chanted. A Christian Devotee of God describes this kind of Asapai Mantra graphically in his book "The Way of a Pilgrim". It is called "interior and spiritual ceaseless prayer". It is said to be "self-acting in the heart." About this prayer, the devotee gives this graphic description.

".....And this journey I undertook, all the while saying my oral prayer without stopping. After no great lapse of time, I had the feeling that, that Prayer, so to speak, by its own action, passed from my lips to my heart. That is to say, it seemed as though my heart in its ordinary beating began to say the words of the Prayer within, at each beat. Then, for example, first (beat), "Lord", second (beat) "Jesus", third (beat) "Christ", and so on. I gave up saying the Prayer with my lips. I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying." The Prayer of this Devotee was "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The Fifth Section (Vaathula Aagamam), 23 chapters 154 stanzas, is said to contain the principles of Caiva Siddhaantha.

The Sixth Section (Viyaamala Aagamam), 15 chapters, 131 stanzas, describes how Lord Civan Himself comes as the Guru and gives initiation (Deeksha) by look, or touch or word, or pose, or scriptures, or Yogic method, or fragrance emanating from Him. It also describes how the Lord frees the soul from the taint of Aanavam, and confers Mukti.

The Seventh Section (Kaaloththara Aagamam), 37 chapters, 418 stanzas, deals with the six Aadhaaram-s, centres or plexuses in the body beginning with the Moolaadhaara between the anus and the scrotum and ending with Ajñā chakram, a point between the eye-brows. The Kundalini or Serpent Power is said to rise from the Moolaadhaara to the Ajñā and thence to the Sahasra-dala or thousand petalled lotus in the vertex. This section also describes the seven types of Lingams, amorphous representation of Civan, usually hewn in granite stone. This section contains Thirumoolar's animadversion on burning the corpse of a Yogi.

The Eighth Section (Subhra Aagamam), 43 chapters, 527 stanzas, is the longest of the nine Thanthirams. A miscellany of large number of items is dealt with in this section.

The ninth and last Section (Makuta Aagamam, 22 chapters 399 stanzas, gives a description of the seven kinds of dances executed by Lord Civan and the characteristics of those who have apprehended the Godhead.

Thirumoolar will live for ever in the memory of the Tamil people for his great compassion which inspired him to enter the corpse of Moolan the cowherd, and, for the same compassion which bade him create his monumental work.

The Thirumanthiram, it is true, is not a book which anyone who runs may read. It cannot be taken in the stride. Nevertheless, for the hundreds of stanzas couched in cryptic terms there are scores which are cast in simple language, but, all the same, express profound truths. Such a verse is the following:

To anyone is available a green leaf
for (worship of) God;
to anyone, within his means, it is
a mouthful of grass for a cow,
to anyone, when at dinner, possible it is
(to spare) a morsel of food (for a crow),
to anyone, feasible it is,
a kind word to others.

Tm. 252

* * *

Within the compass of just four lines Thirumoolar has encompassed man's duty to God, beast, bird and man, and has shown how simple it is to fulfil it. This feature of brevity and breadth of coverage is an important characteristic of Thirumoolar's verses.

Here is another stanza to show that Thirumoolar can express the most profound truths in the most simple terms. He sings:

Maraththai maraiththathu maamathayaanai
maraththil marainththathu mamathayanai
paraththai maraiththathu paamuthalputham
paraththil marainththathu paamuthalputhame

It is the elephant in rut that veils the wood;
It is the elephant in rut that gets veiled in the wood;
It is the great Elements that veil the Transcendent;
It is the great Elements that get veiled in the

Transcendent.

* * *

A simple simile to illustrate a profound truth. There is a life-like carving of an elephant in wood. Even while we keep looking at the elephant, the wood obtrudes upon our attention and the elephant disappears from our sight. When the wood is seen the elephant is not seen, when the elephant is seen the wood is not seen. Similarly, the Transcendent Being, Brahman, inheres in the five elements—the earth, water, fire, wind and ether. But we do not see Him. When, however, by contemplation, we see Brahman everywhere, the five elements cease to claim our attention as five separate and contrasting elements; they fade out of our sight and mind.

PART II

APPLIED CIVAGNAANA-BODHAM

VERSE 12 OF CIVA-GNAANA-BODHAM

(Through the help of gnosis)
get rid of that (aanava) Malam
which prevents you
from uniting with the lovely lotus-like
yet strong feet of the Lord;
fraternise with the Lord's devotees
(who have apprehended Reality);
and worship the guise of those who,
to the detriment of delusion,,
are filled with 'Gneyam'
(That which ought to be known—Reality),
and the temple
as verily Haran Himself.

PREFACE TO PART II

Civa-gnana-bhodham is a work of the 12th century A.D. a work created three centuries after Sundaramoorthy Swamikal, the latest of the Servitors written of in the Periya-puranam. Meikandar, the Codifier of the doctrines and dogmas, of the theology and philosophy of Caiva-siddhantha was no original founder of a brand new religion. Seven centuries before him, Thirumoolar had enunciated the most principal dogma of Caiva-Siddhantha and many other doctrines of the Faith. But such dogmas and doctrines were erratically scattered in his vast work of over three-thousand stanzas. Moreover, Servitors of Lord Civan in Tamilnadu, servitors from Kannappar of the B.C. to Sundaramoorthy Swamikal of the ninth century A.D. had led a pattern of lives to which no formal name had been given, which, however, was in fact a life of surrender to God and service to humanity. Meikandar culled from the Thirumanthiram the basic principles of Caiva-siddhantha, and gathered from the lives of the servitors the basic principles and the ideals of their lives and condensed them into twelve aphorisms, and gave them the title of Civa-gnana-bhodham. While the first eleven of the aphorisms are to most people dry dogma and doctrine, the twelfth is a directive to all mankind spelt out in very simple unambiguous words on the lines one should lead one's life. The lives of the Servitors dealt with in this part are the source material for the twelfth aphorism of Civa-gnana-bhodham.

5. WASHING AWAY THE TAINTS.—I

(Clause-I of Soothram 12 of Civagnaanabodham)

The Periya-puraanam is but an elaborate exposition of the 12 Sutrams, aphorisms, of Civa-gnaana-bhodham, and, among them, particularly the 12th Sutram. Each sutram contains several clauses, which are called Athikaranams in Tamil. Meikandar, the author of the basic scripture of Caiva Siddhaantham, himself follows up each Sutram or aphorism with a disquisition on each Athikaranam or clause of that Sutram. The first clause of the 12th aphorism is "Wash Away the Taints", "Maalam kazhiyee".

In the theology of Sanaathana Dharma, including Caiva Siddhaantha Philosophy, the souls—it would not be incorrect to say, 'humanity'—are divided into three categories. First comes 'sakalar' i.e. 'the commonality' who have all the three taints, namely, (i) 'Aanavam'—ignorance or a sense of 'I'ness, as apart from the Godhead, (ii) Kanmam, a Tamil rendering of the Sanskrit term 'Karma', namely deeds good or evil and their fruits; in other words, 'subjection to the Law of Karma', and (iii) Maayai, not delusion as understood in the Advaita Philosophy but the matrix or raw material for all material objects in the universe. The second category of souls is Pralaayakalar who have still the taint of Aanavam and Kanmam. The third and highest category is the 'vignaanakalar', who have only one Malam, taint, namely Aanavam, and are aspirants for Mukti. They are called 'Mumukshu' in Sanskrit, and Muyalvaar by Thiruvalluvar in Tamil.

This and the next chapter concern themselves about three people who were Vignaanakalars and whose still lingering single taint God in His boundless mercy washed away and turned them not merely into Mumukshus, but into Jeevan-muktas, souls which had gained Mukti on earth itself.

One of these Vignaanakalars lived in the City of Puhaar, now called Poompuhaar, but originally well known as Kaaviri-poom-pattinam—the sea-coast city where the River Cauvery enters the sea. To even the veriest tyro in Tamil Literature, the name will

be familiar as Ilanko Adikal has immortalised the place in his epic, the Chilappathikaaram.

This servitor of Lord Civan also belonged, like Kovalan, the hero of Chilappathikaaram, to the merchant community, Vaniyars. Sekkizhaar sings:

In that city, of that clan,
the community's chief merchant was he;
a man of limitless wealth,
well established in prosperity;
chiefmost in quality of bondage
to the Lord of the matted locks
adorned by the pale moon
in the sun-setting rosy sky.

He was famed in this sea-girt world
as one firmly established in the habit
of readily giving whatever they wanted,
without saying, "I have it not",
to the devotees, whoever they were,
eminent in devotion to the Lord with feet
adorned by anklets from which rose
the chimes of the chanted Vedas.

Such was Ulakiyar-p-pakaiyaar
a "Man Who Was Contrary To The Nature Of The World."

-405-2

* * *

We do not know the name his parents gave him at his birth; the world knew him as Iyarpakai Naayanaar. Sekhizhaar continues,

On account of the blessing
of the immeasurable contentment of heart
arising from serfdom
to the Sire who bears the Ganges on His crown,
he fulfilled through action
whatever the devotees of holy bodies
adorned by the sacred ash
had in their thoughts;
and he cherished and served them
in the conviction that all the blessings
gained by leading a householder's life
resplendently according to the eternal
and unchanging righteous code of conduct
(laid down for a householder)

were the fruits of the greatness
arising from doing the bidding
of those devotees.

* * *

(While he was spending his days thus),
the Lord who is a subtle Object
of search and research,
and is, at the same time,
a Person who dances openly (for all to see)
on the Hall in Thillai—
did He do what He did
with the knowledge of His Consort high above,
or was it without the knowledge of Her
who is inseparable from Him?
We don't know.
With the pure ash shining on His body of golden hue,
displaying the guise of a libertine Brahmana,
assuming thus a delusive disguise,
the Lord came to exhibit to the world
the never-denying nature of His devotee.

407-4.

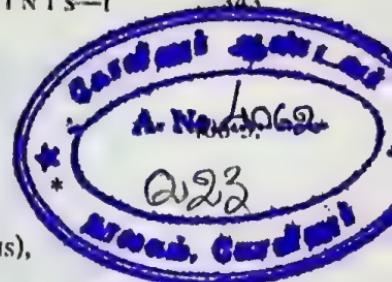
* * *

On His arriving at Puhaar of cool waters
and entering the house of Iyar-p-pakaiyaar
in the street where the merchant-class lived,
Iyar-p-pakaiyaar,
impelled by the abiding joyous ardour
arising from the thought,
“Lo, my Father, my Liege-Lord's devotee has come,”
with heart-felt love went forward,
paid his obeisance,
and, after performing the elaborate
and noteworthy formalities of reception, said:
“I presume that on account of great Thavam
formerly performed by me,
O Muni, you have graciously come here.”

408-5.

* * *

The vile Brahmana
who had by now arrived near
and stood before Iyar-p-pakaiyaar
who had greeted him thus,
said:



"Having heard that, considering as quite proper whatever the devotees of the Lord of matted locks decked abundantly with Kondrai flowers set their mind on and ask for, you gladly give without any objection, I have come here today to you seeking one thing. If that would be agreeable to you, I may tell you that."

409-6.

* * *

Hearing those words, Iyar-p-pakaiyaar said:

"Whatever thing is with me,
that is the property
of the devotees of my Lord;
there is no doubt about it;
do graciously command me." On his saying so, the Lord in the guise of a libertine Brahmana replied, "Your wife, the abode of your love, desiring her, I came here." Though this, the beautiful-eyed-Lord said to his very face, Iyer-p-pakaiyaar grew more joyous than before, and, adoring the pure-minded devotee, these words he spoke.

410-7.

* * *

"This is indeed a great favour done to me by you, my Lord, for you have desired for an object which I have already with me."

Having said so, he went immediately inside his house, and thus addressed his beloved life-mate, eminent by her chastity:

"O Dame of my clan wedded to me by prescribd rites! Today you to this man of true Thavam I have given."

On his saying so, his wife of tresses decked with honey-seeping blossoms,

was first flustered, but, gaining clarity of mind later on, said thus:

411-8.

* * *

"If this is the grace you bestow on me today,
 O Lord of my life,
 other than doing just that
 which you have spoken,
 is there any other right for me?"
 Saying so, she paid obeisance
 to her unique great husband,
 and he, in turn, paid obeisance to her;
 and both together went and worshipped
 the rosy feet of the man of great Thavam.
 Nevertheless, puzzled stood she,
 greater than Lakshmi.

412-9.

* * *

Puzzled stood she, and puzzled we pause here. Thiruvalluvar has said of men who cast lustful eyes on the wives of confiding men:

"No different from the dead are those
 who behave with evil intent
 towards a confiding man's wife."

(143)

* * *

And yet here, a person whom Sekkizhaar first described as a vile Brahmana but who later turned out to be no other than the wily Lord Civan Himself, has the audacity to ask as a gift another man's wife; the husband readily says "Given"! And the wife reluctantly but later readily agrees to be given away as a gift.

Sekkizhaar, whose work offers little scope for the exercise of humour, jumps at this opportunity to display his sense of humour and speculates in the 4th stanza whether Lord Civan set out on this lustful jaunt with the knowledge of His Consort or without Her knowledge. The reason Sekkizhaar puts forward for this *leela*, or prank of Lord Civan, is that He wanted to exhibit to the world the never-denying nature of His devotee.

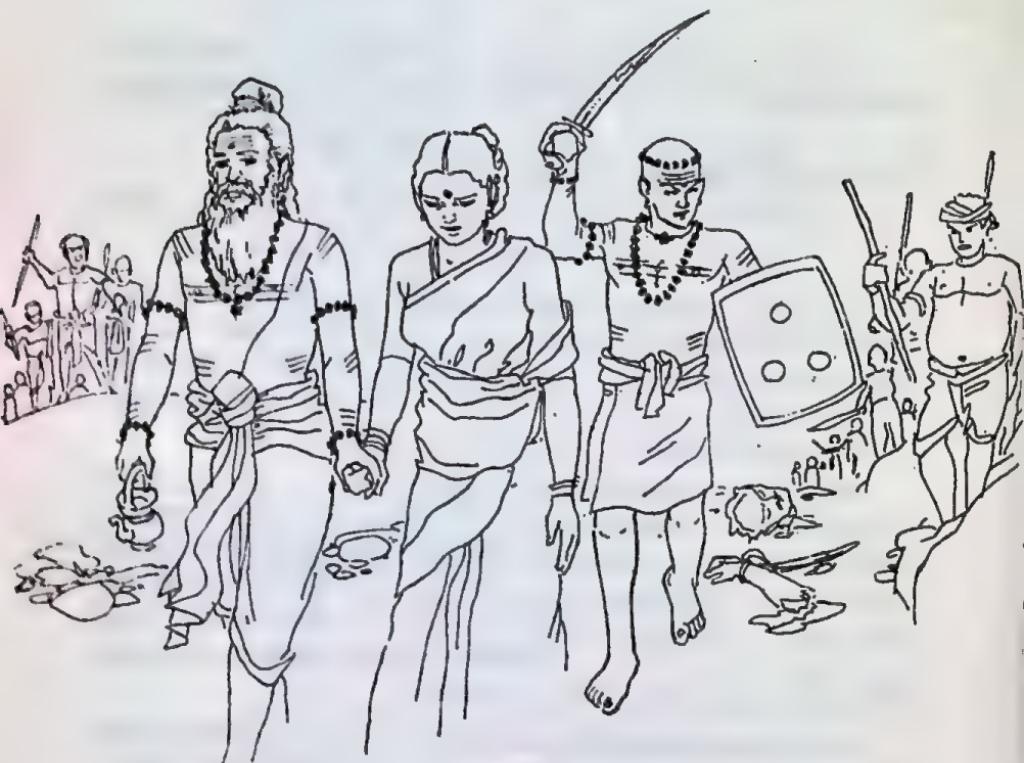
When God made His bizarre demand, God, whom Thirumoolar defined as one whose other name was Love, was doing all this to Iyar-p-pakai Nayanar on the principle of Thiruvalluvar's maxim,

Like gold, which the oftener it is smelted
 the brighter it sparkles,
 the more suffering scorches those who practise Thavam,
 the more does enlightenment shine in them (267).

* * *

Iyar-p-pakai Nayanar, in every other respect, was fit for Mukti but this wee bit of attachment to his wife stood in his way. Lord Civan, wanted to cleanse Iyar-p-pakai Nayanar of the small stain which stood in the way of his entering the Kingdom of God. This is the same principle underlying the chronicles of two other devotees included in this chapter.

We can now conclude this narration with a few words. Lord Civan was not satisfied with getting the wife of Iyar-p-pakai Nayanar but wanted safe escort past the angry and antagonistic kith and



kin and subjects of the Naayaanar. Iyar-p-pakai Nayanar himself with naked sword ploughed his way through the throng of opponents and swam through the river of blood of the victims of his sword and left Lord Civan and his wife in a place of safety and himself left the world simultaneously as his life's ideal had been achieved—that is gaining the haven of the feet of Lord Civan.

Of him Sundarar sings:

“Servitor am I to Iyarrapakai also,
who never said, “I have not.”

* * *

And Nambi-andar-nambi expanded Sundarar's words thus:

“Being in the habit of giving
whatever those who performed Thavam demanded,
when Civan coming in the guise of a Thapasvi,
spoke vile words
and said: “Give me your beloved wife,”
he, who promptly gave away
her with collyrium-tinted eyes,
is Iyarrpakai of Caviri-p-poom-pattinam
which gained deserved great fame from his act.

* * *

(ii)

Another servitor whose small stain of a taint had to be washed and whose love had to be made total was Manakkanjarar of Kanjaru, said to be known today as Aanathaandaavapuram, a corruption of Aananda-thaandava-puram, a Railway Station on the Southern Railway, 7 kms. to the north of Mayilaaduthurai on the main line to Madras. Of this servitor, Sundarar sings:

“Servitor to the servitors of Manakkanjarar,
the Munificent One of shoulders of rocky might.”

* * *

And Nambi-andar-nambi expanded Sundarar's few words into an expert precis of the life of this munificent servitor. He sings:

A Virgin of rounded breasts
beloved daughter,
of a person of welfare-productive Thavam saying:
“Give me her fragrant tresses
for use as a five-strand sacred thread
across our chest”.
without considering that such an act
would cause grief to one and all,

her tresses cut off and gave away he,
 the munificent one called
 Manakkanjarranaar of Kanjai
 of ramparts resembling mountain ranges.

* * *

Manakkanjarranar, a man who had knowledge and experience of the Reality, was born at Kanjaarru, like a reserve treasure in a family of the Velaalar clan from whom the King's Commanders-in-Chief were recruited.

He was the personification of humility;
 he had the undiminishing great blessing
 of gaining the qualification to become
 a slave unto the Lord with a crown of matted locks
 adorned by the snake and the cool moon.
 He assumed as his profession
 the vocation of only doing service
 to the devotees who out of conviction
 relied on the feet of our Lord.

873.8

* * *

As more and more the prosperity
 of his peerless wealth grew,
 he considered as the owners thereof,
 (not himself, but) the devotees
 of everlasting great Jeevan-mukta-hood,
 slaves to the Compassionate One
 of a shock of matted locks
 in which a river dwells;
 and before they could put into words
 the name of any article,
 he learnt by observation what they needed,
 and bestowed it on them.

874-9

* * *

Such a wealthy man had one want. He had no children. His fervent prayers to the Lord were heard and answered by the gift of a glamorous daughter.

Infancy, childhood, girlhood each followed the other with amazing rapidity till she attained marriageable age. Like every parent who was blessed with a child long after he had given up hopes

of ever becoming a father, the child was petted and fondled by him and all others too, and was brought up with lavish love and luxury.

Soon, a marriage proposal came, it was found acceptable, and the date of the wedding was fixed with promptitude. The bridegroom-elect was no other than our Eyar-kon Kalikkamanar whose chronicle has been exhaustively related in the chapter 'Companion of God.'

Beautiful as the girl was, her special beauty lay in her thicket-like lustrous dark hair which reached her heels and even trailed on the ground.

Manakkanjarrar's daughter's tresses were extremely attractive and the fond parent was very proud of it, and, perhaps, part of his extraordinary love for his daughter was for love of her incomparably thick, dark and long, long tresses. Let us hear Sekkizhaar tell us the further tale. He sings:

Before the bridegroom's party
could arrive at that town,
through another way, into the blessed house
of those who begot the bejewelled maid
of eyes resembling flowers in bloom,
entered the Lord of the heaven-dwellers—
the Being eternally abiding in the heart
of the begetter of the maid—
that the world girt by the wave-tossed waters
might redeemed be.

886-21.

* * *

On the crown of the shaven head,
a tuft of hair;
over the forehead
three stripes of sacred ash;
tied to the tip of the tuft,
an ornament of human bone;
in the ear, a white pearl-like ring
turned out on a lathe
out of the bone of the skeleton of a person
which the Lord carried on His shoulders
long, long ago.

887-22.

* * *

Around the neck,
 a low-slung garland strung
 out of pieces of that same shining bone;
 on His shoulder,
 an upper garment of silk
 instead of the snake with the bag of poison;
 across the chest,
 a sacred thread of five strands spun out of hair
 of dark hue;
 stuck in His waist cloth;
 a sachet of the sacred ash
 which is an antidote to rebirth
 of devotees of pure mind,

888-23.

* * *

A wristlet of bones on one forearm,
 a hallowed waist cloth flapping over
 the loin cloth whose woof and warp
 are the unique Vedas,
 an unportrayable pair of holy feet
 which have trod this vast world,
 and
 on the soles of the holy feet the five holy seals
 (the whorls which signify royal
 or spiritual eminence).
 Displaying these things,

889-24.

* * *

arrived He in the beflagged street
 and entered the house of His devotee—
 whose mind was a haven
 for His cool lotus feet—
 in the guise of a person
 on whose holy body shone an expanse of sacred ash
 like ash which covers
 a smouldering ruddy fire.

890-25.

* * *

The Lord, personification of excellent Thavam,
 looked at the prosperous devotee, and asked;
 "What is the auspicious event
 which is happening here?"
 On his replying, "This is the occasion
 of the marriage of the lissom daughter
 begotten by this servant of yours",

the man of great Thavam blessed him with these words:
“May well-being and prosperity attend you!” 892-27

* * *

Forthwith, Manakkanjarranar worshipped the feet
of the performer of Thavam
which confers gnosis;
entered his house,
took along with him his beloved daughter
of honey-glistening flower-laden tresses
who was dressed in her bridal trousseau
and bade her pay obeisance
to him who came hiding his throat
of the colour of the blue lily.

893-28

* * *

Looking at the flower-laden tresses
which looked as if a rain-laden dark cloud
was luxuriously flourishing on the head



of the lissom simple maid
 who rose up after paying obeisance to his feet,
 He, who offers the haven of His feet
 to those who adore Him,
 turned to the servitor
 who stood with palms joined in worshipping pose,
 and said:
 "This dryad's hair, to us
 will serve to make a sacred thread
 of five strands."

894-29.

* * *

No sooner than he had heard the words
 so graciously said,
 he drew his smiting scimitar
 and, saying to himself,
 "I feel blest by these tresses being said to be
 a thing of worth and usefulness",
 sheared to the very roots
 the darkness-diffusing tresses
 of the flower-bearing-creeper-like maid,
 and stretched it towards the hands
 of Him who shears birth born of delusion—
 Him who now stood in front of him.

895-30.

* * *

The Hidden Content of the Vedas
 who stood as one about to receive the tresses
 disappeared from sight
 and, with His Consort,
 the lissom Mountain Maid, on His side,
 appeared on the sky above
 mounted on His ancient and war-like bull.
 As if bringing the sky and the earth nearer,
 a shower of golden flowers
 hung in the sky;
 the servitor adored Him
 and fell prostrate before Him.

896-31.

* * *

Simultaneously with shearing off the hair of his beloved daughter, he sheared off the attachment which stood in the way of his gaining Mukti for which very purpose the gracious Lord Civan came in the guise of an ordinary Thapasvi and walked down the streets of Kanjaarroor.

(iii)

Chiru-th-thondar was another Vignaanakalar, a soul with but a single taint clinging to it. The taints are called malam in Tamil Caiva Siddhaantha canonical works. They are referred to as Paasam in the first Sootram, aphorism of Civa-gnaana-bhodham. Paasam means a rope, a rope that keeps the soul bound to the cycle of births and deaths. St. Manikkavachakar sings:

“O my Lord Who, on the other hand,
took pity on me of potent Karma
whose nine-outletted foul excreta-dripping dwelling—
made up of Real-self-hiding ignorance
bound with the remarkable rope
of good and evil deeds,
and wrapped all over with a skin
to hide the worm-infested filth—
was to its bewilderment perfidiously betrayed
by the five senses-....”

The Paasams are three. Aanava-malam, the taint of I-ness, or Ignorance, Karma, and Maayai. This Maayai is not the delusion of the Advaitin's but the matrix of all material things in the universe. It will be seen that Manikkavaachakar refers to all the three in the above lines quoted from Civa-puraanam, the first decad of his Thiruvaachakam. “Nine-outletted foul excreta-dripping dwelling” is the Maayai, “The Real-Self hiding ignorance” is the Aanava malam, and “Good and evil deeds” is Karma. Note that he uses the word “rope”, Paasam. But, correctly speaking, the Aanava malam alone is the Paasam, the taint. Maayai provides the body to the soul for it to be embodied, and Karma, the twin deeds of good and evil, birth after birth, actually helps the soul in its struggle to rid itself of the taint, the Aanava malam, in its struggle to gain freedom from the bonds of the cycle of deaths and births.

Chiruththondar hailed from Thiru-ch-chengattankudy, a village situated about three kilometres from Thiruppukaloor which is at a distance of six kilometres from Nannilam, a railway station on the Southern Railway in Thanjavoor District. He belonged to the Maa-maaththirar caste.

He was an Ayurvedic physician and was, naturally, a scholar in Sanskrit; he was moreover skilled in the wielding of battle

weapons. Later on, from his chronicle we shall learn that he was greatly skilled in dissecting a body. It has been observed in the Preamble that the Periya Puranam deals with a vertical cross-section of society. With a substratum of a Chandala, a man who eats the offal of a cow, the whole village economy is represented in the Periya Puranam. Thiruneelakantar the Potter, Thirukkurippu Naayanaar the Washerman, Nesar the Weaver, Aanaayar the Cowherd, Kaliyar the Oilmiller, Moorthi the village merchant, Enathi-naayanar the toddy-tapper, Athipaththar the fisherman, landlords and peasants galore, Pukazhththunaiyar, the Aadhi-Caivar who officiated as the temple priest, Rudhra-pasupathiyan the Vedic Brahmana, and Princes and Kings galore. There is also a gambler (Moorkkar), a mercenary soldier (Munai-aduvaar). But one profession is missing. Where is the man whose wife acted as midwife to the mothers of the village, and who was and is an indispensable attendant in one's funeral? Where is the man who was also the village's physician and surgeon too? Where is the village barber? Such an omission mars the architectonics of the Periya Puranam.

He was not always called Chiruth-thondar. Paranjothi was the name his parents gave him at his birth.

Sekkizhaar explains how he came by the name of Chiru-thondar.

By his voluntary manner of serving
the devotees of the Lord
who has packed into His russet matted locks
the cool moon along with the snake,
he conducted himself as a very small servitor
before those men of eminence;
therefore, he was known in the world
by the name of Chiruththondar—
the Petty Servitor.

3674-15

No doubt he was an Ayurvedic physician, and was, naturally, a scholar in Sanskrit; he was, moreover, skilled in the wielding of battle weapons. At heart and in deed, however, he was a servitor to the servitors of Lord Civan. Once, in the course of his military duties, he led an Elephant Corps in a war against Vaathaavi in the north and returned a triumphant victor followed by a long

train of loot on the backs of pack animals. When the King was congratulating and honouring him, the Chief Ministers whispered in the ears of the king that Chiruththondar's main occupation and vocation was that of a servitor to the servitors of Lord Civan. Straightway the king apologised for taking him away from his vocation, and promptly released him from military service.

Sekkizhaar relates in three stanzas what Ciruththondar did on being thus released by the king.

That he might do sincere service
unto the devotees of the Author of the Vedas,
in the respective ways they desired,
with the praiseworthy pride of possessing
the consent and cooperation
of the beloved mate of his householder's life,
Thiruvenkaattu Nangai by name
born in a fault-free family,
he stood established in the habit
of performing the righteous acts
enjoined on a righteous family-life.

3671-12

* * *

He stood eminent in the pure service
which he had undertaken as his chosen vocation
and which he performed in an unwavering manner
on account of a great desire for the contentment
conferred on the mind by daily serving sacred food
in the prescribed manner day after day
first to the devotees of the Lord
with the sacred crown
decked with honey-dripping Kondrai flowers,
and taking his food only later on.

3672-12

* * *

Pure sacramental rice, fruits, sweets,
curries of six savours, ghee, slabs of curd,
milk, delicious cakes, nectarine drinking water—
such a dinner daily he served.
The devotees were delighted with this person
whom this great vast world
continues to praise to this day.

3673-14

* * *

Of this servitor Sundarar sang:

"Servitor am I to Chengaattangkudi-abiding
Chiruththondar."

and

Nambi-andaar-Nambi expanded the above line thus:

To the Virtuous One who has as His waist cloth
the pelt of a tiger,
he offered as savoury food
his only son of tinkling anklets
and lisping words,
and butchered his body therefore.

Note that he is no other than the Chieftain
of groves-abounding eminent Chengaattangkudi,
Ciruththondar by name,
of the eminent fame of subduing
the power of Kali.

* * *

Chiruththondar and his wife immersed themselves in the discharge of their vocation and should have been very happy. But their cup of happiness was not overflowing. It was not even full. For, they had no children. Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale.

By the grace of the Lord,
with a crown of matted locks
brimful with the waters of the Ganges,
to this man of great name and fame,
as a favour for his consummate Thavam,
through the womb of the dame
hailing from Thiruvenkaadu,
who was famed in the world
as the tap-root of righteous family-life
of day to day increasing glory.,
incarnated a holy son called Seeraala-thevar.

3676-17

* * *

While Ciruththondar's relatives rejoiced,
feeling proud of the decorations
that adorned the house;
when, as a rare event,
a unique son was born to Chiruththondar,
in the minds of the parents,

the joy arising from gaining
a gem rare-to-gain
grew in an uncontainable manner;
and
the whole town of Chengaattaamkudi
celebrated the event by a ritual
of taking auspicious oil-baths.

3677-18

* * *

While the sound of the musical instruments
and of the chanted Vedas
reverberated in the skies;
to the eminent devotees of the Lord of lovely eyes
limitless largesses he gave;
his particular caste's prescribed ceremonies
on each of the ten days following the birth,
with great ebullient joy he performed;
and adorned the child with anklets
and wristlets.

3678-19

* * *

To his great band of ardent relatives
with rejoicing heart he gave great gifts;
and with delight which infected all the world
he performed in elaborate style
the various rituals and celebrations
prescribed for each stage of the growth of the child.
Thus brought up, his glorious son
reached the stage of a toddler of faltering feet
on which tinkling anklets made their own music.

3579-20

* * *

A pendant on the forehead
clustered with curls of hair,
ear studs on the two ears,
a gold necklace around the neck,
dangling on the chest the aimpadai—
a talisman,
on the wrists peerless pairs
of diamond-studded bangles,
a golden belt around the waist,
and a pair of twinkling anklets
on the feet—

Chiruththondar spent his time
absorbed in watching the play in the streets
of the growing child thus gloriously adorned. 3680-21

* * *

In the rapidly arrived third year
 of the growth of the child,
 he performed the auspicious ceremony
 of the shaving of the hair of the head of the child;
 and, that he might receive training
 in the various fine arts of literary nature
 which would give clarity
 of expression in words
 to the thoughts blossoming in his mind,
 he put to school the child
 who came into the world
 to sever the bonds of attachment
 of Chiruththondar.

3681-22

* * *

While this was going on like this,
 Chiruththondar's dedicated service
 (grew and) reached the feet
 of the Father on the great Kailasa.
 And the Lord astride the bull,
 graciously desirous of experiencing
 his steadfast love,
 came down from the holy mountain
 in the guise of a Vairavar,
 His mind on bestowal of benevolence bent.

3684-25

* * *

Like one possessed
 by an unappeasable fiery hunger,
 the Vairavar enquired of people he met
 the whereabouts of the house of Chiruththondar,
 and, reaching it speedily, he hailed:
 "Is the holy devotee of bees-hovering flower garland
 who provides food every day to servants of God
 at home?"

3685-36

* * *

Sure that he who had come up to the house
 and was even now making the enquiry
 was certainly a man of great Thavam,
 a handmaiden, Sandanam by name,
 came to the front of the house
 and falling at his feet, said:
 "He has gone out
 looking for some devotee of limitless glory;
 O our master, please graciously come in".

3686-37

* * *

Looking at the woman, he graciously said:
“We do not enter all by ourselves a house
where there are women only.”

Hearing that

and fearing that he looked like taking his leave,
the housewifely-duty-bound dame of Thiruvenkaadu
hurriedly reached the outer door (and said):
“He is wont to feed a devotee of the Lord in the Hall,
but today my lord has not found anyone:
he has gone out in search of one;
if he sees the guise
in which you have come unexpectedly,
he will consider it his great good fortune
and rejoice greatly;
he will not be late in coming.”

3687-3688-38,39.

* * *

“He will come this very moment,
do graciously come in and be seated,”
she pleaded.

He replied:

“O lady who observes unmatched household virtue!
we reside in Uttharapathi,
we came here to see Chiruththondar of ineffable merit;
by no means will we stay here in his absence.”

* * *

Saying so, and adding that he could be found under an Atthi
tree of colourful flowers near the temple, he went away.

The Lord need not have come there in the absence of Ciruththondar. It must have been to prepare the mind of the housewife by His Chakshudeeksha—initiation by gracious look—to the gruesome sacrifice He would demand later on. It was a visit with a gracious purpose

When her husband returned after a vain search for a pious guest to share food with, she told him about the visitor, and he rushed to the temple and, finding the devotee, fell at his feet and stood up respectfully before him. Looking at him standing in his presence, the holy devotee asked: “Neero periya-chiruththondar?” “Are you the great small devotee?” For, ‘Chiruththondar’ means a small devotee, meanest of mean devotees. He replied “Yes”, and begged the holy devotee to grace his home with his august presence and take food with them. To this, the devotee replied: “You cannot provide us with the food we want.”

After much persuasion he replied: "After every three seasons, we eat an animal which has been slaughtered for us." On being pressed to say his preference among animals, he replied:

O man of exuberant love!
 The animal to be slaughtered for us
 is a human being!
 That too, provided it is within five years of age,
 and no blemish there is in its organs.
 There is one thing more to say;
 that will be like thrusting a spear
 into a painful wound!

3709-50

* * *

On being told:
 "Nothing is impossible,
 please tell it quickly,"
 the Lord replied:
 "A good boy,
 the only son in the family,
 the father should slaughter him
 while the mother holds him fast;
 thus if both of them ungrievedly do,
 and serve it as a curry to us,
 that is the food we eat!"

3710-51

* * *

Saying: "This too is not impossible for me," Chiruththondar went back jubilantly to his house. And to the wife, who came forward to hear the success of his mission, he related the specification given by the holy devotee for his menu. The virtuous lady replied: "We shall, of course, prepare in the proper manner the type of food which will enable us to get him take food in our house, but where are we going to get the only son of a family?"

Let Sekkizhaar tell the rest of the story.

Looking into the face of his wife, he said:

"Will there be anyone
 who will give this type of a son
 even if we give them a fortune
 surpassing their imagination?
 There is no father or mother

who would come forward
and chop their son personally.
Therefore, without further delay,
let us call him here
whom you bore that I may be redeemed." 3715-56

* * *

On hearing her husband say so,
she agreed to that,
and delighted that they could get
the devotee of the Lord to dine with them
and see his face beam with satisfaction,
the lady resembling Lakshmi said:
"Go and fetch from school
the Gem who will save us from this predicament."

3716-57

* * *

When the child was brought from school, she went
forward, and receiving him in her arms,
the lady of feet with softness
which cotton is envious of,
brushed his dishevelled hair,
wiped his face,
removed the dust from his ear-stud and belt,
felt sad at the rubbed-off rouge,
pushed back the collyrium to his eyes,
and, after giving him a bath with fervour,
she dressed and adorned him stylishly,
leaving nothing out,
and lifting him up
gave him into the hands of her husband. 3719-60

* * *

Because the lad was to become curry (for the devotee),
they would not kiss the dear son on the head
or hug him to their chest and feast on his kisses,
having qualms about doing so.
Intent on preparing the curry for the Pure One—
the holy devotee—
(in as pure a manner as possible),
they would not go to the kitchen,
but took him to another place
with rejoicing mind. 3720-61

* * *

With one mind, both of them,
 fearing that the world would not understand them,
 went into a hidden place
 and, while the mother washed the vessels well
 and brought them along with her,
 the father, who had conquered the world (of five senses)
 took hold of the head of the son,
 and the devoted mother hurried forward,

3721-612

* *

thrust the sweet twinkling sound-raising legs
 between her thighs
 and held the hands tightly in her hands.



Even as the darling, thinking that his parents
 were greatly delighted with him,
 was delighted in turn and laughed,
 the father began cutting the head
 of the unique great son
 with the instrument
 while the anklet on the legs raised a musical sound.

3722-63

Sekkizhaaf, whose sensitive mind would not say, in the case of Meipporul-naayanaar, that the wily Muththanaathan stabbed him, but would merely relate that he did exactly as he had planned beforehand to do, because the stabbing was a villainous act against a devotee, has no compunction in describing in meticulous detail every little step of the gruesome drama; for this was a holy act in the service of a devotee of Civan.

We need not go further along with the tale; how the lady did not cook the head as she thought that it might not be an acceptable dish to the devotee, how he called for it too, how she cooked it and served it, how, as a crowning act of refined cruelty, the devotee said that he could not dine alone but must have another devotee as a fellow guest, how the father of the boy had to fill the role, how, not content with this, the Vairavan bade the father call the son if he had one, how the sore-tried father replied: "He is not available now", and, how, on the insistence of the Vairavan, the father called, and how the dead son, the son who had been cooked and served as a curry, came running along from the backyard and rushed into the arms of his stricken parents.

A sequence of events in this story is worth examining. The Lord first conferred a vision on Chiruththondar and his wife. This enabled them to gain apprehension of the Reality—to gain what is called "Meiunarthal" by Thiruvalluvar in chapter 36 of the Thirukkural. The chapter on 'Extirpation of Desire' follows the above chapter, even as it follows in the mystic experience of a seeker. Concluding the Chapter on 'Renunciation', Thiruvalluvar said:

Cultivate attachment to Him
who has no attachments;
cultivate that attachment
in order to leave other attachments.

350

This calls for, in natural order, first, apprehension of the Real; next, the extirpation of desire. True to this mystic formula, Lord Civan first conferred a vision of Himself on the couple and next asked for the supreme extirpation of attachment—the attachment to their beloved son. Lord Civan is not a cannibal. He is grace incarnate. Mukti follows extirpation of desire as day follows night, enlightenment follows ignorance. Thiruvalluvar avers this:

"If one extirpates desire of insatiable nature,
that very state will confer on one
the never-quitting (eternal) state (of Mukti)",

370

* * *

and Nammalvaar affirms:

".....if one forsakes attachment,
that very day, nay, that very moment,
the same becomes Mukti indeed,
that very forsaking becomes Freedom—Mukti—
(from the bonds of birth and death)".

* * *

Thiruvenkaattumangai and Chiruththondar washed away the taint on their souls in the blood of their son who, in the words of Sekkizhaar,

"came into the world
to sever the bonds of attachment
of Chiruththondar."

6. WASHING AWAY THE TAINTS-II

(Clause 1 of Soothram 12 of Civagnaanabodham)

Pride in craftsmanship is one thing, vanity in one's craftsmanship is another thing. The former is a legitimate feeling, the latter is the taint of 'I-ness', Aanava malam as it is called in Tamil. Such a taint, ever so little let it be, in ever so great a servitor of God it may be, will be a bar to Mukti.

Sekkizhaar, setting out to record the chronicle of one such great Servitor, lavishes no less than one hundred and ten stanzas out of one hundred and twenty-eight to describe the glory of Thondainaadu, the country to which our servitor belonged. Stating in the second stanza itself that Thondainaadu was famed for having many cities noted for residents of a high standard of righteous conduct of life, in the third stanza, he gives pride of place to one of those cities.

Pazhaiyanoor was that city. It was situated on the banks of the River Paali whose conditions in the hot summer and in the flash flood days of the rainy season have been poetically described by Sekkizhaar in two picturesque stanzas.

It is impossible to resist the temptation to relate a historical incident which has immortalised that hamlet for all time in Tamil Literature. A man belonging to the merchant caste, caught in the charms of a prostitute had killed his wife. The murdered wife turned herself into a ghost and was bent on wreaking vengeance on her husband. On one occasion, she turned into a woman and, turning a rotted branch of a cactus into an infant, followed the husband into the village and into the presence of the elders of the village. Both poured out their plaint and the elders bade them sleep together in a hut and come up before them the next morning. The husband always carried a sword in his hand to defend himself against his ghostly wife. Now the woman petitioned the Panchaayat to bid the man leave his sword outside the bed-room. The man protested, but the seventy elders assured him that if harm happened to him, they would pay for it with their own lives. During the night, the ghostly wife ripped open the bowels of her husband and

killed him. Sekkizhaar, referring to this incident of long long ago sings:

The great Thondainaadu was the state
which gained the greatness for which it is famous
by the goodness-desiring Chiruththondars,
Velaalars of Pazhaiyanoor
who, when dishonour came on them,
weighed the merit to be gained
by honouring their word given to a merchant ,
against saving their lives,
and saved their word
and sacrificed their lives.

1080-3

* * *

In Kaanchi of Thondai-naadu famed for its Pazhaiyanoor, Thiru-k-kurippu-th-thondar plied his profession which was also his avenue for service.

Sekkizhaar, whose own home-town of Kundrraththoor was in Thondainaadu whose capital was Kaanchipuram, breaks all canons of literary propriety and devotes no less 110 stanzas out of a total 128 stanzas to a panegyric of the fauna and flora, rivers and mountains, mansions and Mandirs, legends and lore, people and princes, deities and devotees of that zone in general, and of Kaanchipuram in particular. Let Sekkizhaar's remaining eighteen stanzas tell us the tale in which the taint which took the form of vanity in one's craftsmanship was washed, even as the servitor washed clean the much tainted and stained clothes of devotees of the Lord. Sekkizhaar sings:

In such a sacred city he lived.
In this world, by birth,
he was a member of the clan of Ekaaliyars—Washermen,
He was endowed with a mind
full of perfect love;
he trod the path of righteous living;
he became one among the long line
of the galaxy of servitors of the Lord
of dark-tinted throat.

1188-111

* * *

After his birth on earth,
he dedicated to the rosy feet of the Lord

his thought, word, and deed;
and by the strength of his trait
of serving the virtuous true devotees
by intuiting their needs from their facial expression,
he was known by the name,
Thiru-k-kurippu-th-thondar.

1189,112

* * *

In Kaanchi,
echoing in all directions
with the clatter of chariots
and the hooves of horses,
he had the true repute of being acclaimed
by the rare-to-confer title
of the greatest washerman
who washed for the city.

He washed with great eagerness
for those whose hearts melted
on hearing the resounding names
of the Lord with a sacred crown
on which the waters of the Ganges
and the snake hiding in the crown
make their respective noises.

1190-113

* * *

Simultaneously with getting rid of the dirt
on the clothes of the devotees
of the rosy lotus-like effulgent feet of the Lord,
he was spending his days
in trying to rid himself of the great dirt of birth
accompanied by the three taints
which is the blessing of past Karma.

On one such day,

1191-114

* * *

Our Lord,
who on that day in the past
graciously came down
to measure the quality of the good Thavam
of the blossoming-creeper-like Maid
begot by the grace of the Lord
by the King of the Mountain of golden hue,
noted the state of the unique servitor,
His devotee,
and came up to him
with the intention of conferring grace on him. 1192-115

* * *

In the severe cold season,
 lean like a poverty-stricken person,
 and clothed in a very dirty garment,
 assuming the guise of a great Thapasvi,
 walking on feet not known by Vishnu,
 the Lord approached with faltering steps
 the devotee of untainted mind.

1193-115

* * *

Seeing the approaching great Thapasvi
 of such a frame of body—
 clad in a dirty cloth
 dusky like a dark cloud—
 on which shone the sacred ash,
 Thirukkuripputhondar went forward,
 received him with pleasure,
 prostrated at his feet
 with all the hair on his body tingling with joy,
 and rose.

1194-117

* * *

Intuiting the Thapasvi's object
 even as he was coming towards him,
 he said many sweet words,
 and enquired with concern in his voice,
 "O Performer of Thavam,
 why is your holy body wasted so thin?"
 Then, with joined palms, he said:
 "Do please hand over to me
 your waist cloth for washing!"
 Thereupon, the Person of great Thavam,
 He who had concealed his dusky throat,
 graciously replied:

1195-118

* * *

"Though this dhoti is encrusted with dirt
 difficult for any detergent to remove,
 I will not let it go
 on account of the cold
 which bores its way into my bones;
 if, however, you would give it back
 before the sun reaches yonder hill,
 take it with you, and go and wash it
 and bring it back," he said.

1196-119

* * *

"Do please give this cloth;
without delay, I shall wash it,
and will give it back to you
before twilight sets in," said he in reply.
Where upon He said:

"This cloth, washed and dried,
swiftly this very day if you do not give,
to this body you would do great harm."

Saying so, he gave the cloth and went away. 1197-120

* * *

That he might wash and deliver the cloth
at the appointed time,
he took it along to the washing ghat
of fragrant flower-abounding waters,
beat the dirt out of the cloth,
steamed it very well
(in a Fuller's earth container),
and was about to beat it again
when rain began to pour down.

1198-121

* * *

Banks of serried clouds
crammed the space above
throwing a pall of darkness in every direction;
the shafts of water pouring from above
blocked the eyes from penetrating the sheets of
water.

The senses of the servitor of troubled mind reeled.
He remembered the promise given to the devotee,
and stood stunned, saying to himself,
"Now, what shall I do?".

1199-122

* * *

"The unceasing pouring rain might perhaps cease,"
with such hope the sacred servitor of Lord Civan,
the Kapali,
stood in solitude; but ceasing of the rain, he did not see.
And when night set in like a sworn enemy,
he fainted and fell down crying;
"Ah! Failed have I in this small service
to the meritorious Thapasvi of shivering body." 1200-123

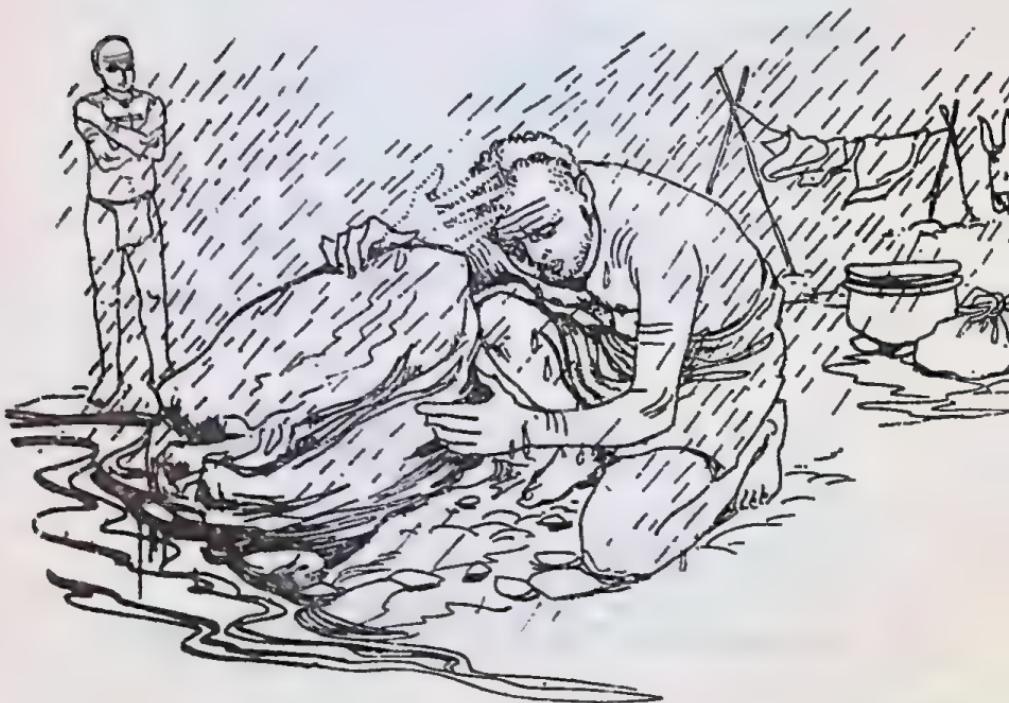
* * *

"The time-limit set by the man of true Thavam
 has passed long since
 without the pouring rain not pausing at all.
 It did not occur to me
 to wash it before other clothes
 and let it have the benefit
 of the breeze inside my house.
 Now, this is the only course of action left to me,
 a wretch among devotees,
 who has been the cause
 of the evil of witnessing the sacred body
 of the man of perfect Thavam
 shiver with the cold."
 Thus he made up his mind,
 and rose from the ground.

1201-124

* * *

Declaring,
 "On the stony slab on which I smite
 the clothes to rid them of their dirt,
 my head I shall smite to smithereens,"



he approached the shining slab.
 On his striking his head against it,
 from the side of that stone
 appeared the blossomy rosy hand
 of the Lord whose body bore the imprint
 of the bangles of His Consort,
 and rose and caught hold of the head. 1202-125

* * *

The sky-filling shower of waters ceased
 and changed into a shower of flowers;
 the Lord of the sacred crown
 decked with honey-dripping Kondrai flowers,
 mounted on His belligerant bull,
 and accompanied by His Omnipresent Consort
 stood in the space above.
 The dedicated devotee,
 his heart filled to the brim with welling love,
 stood alone,
 worshipping Him with his joined palms. 1203-126

* * *

Looking at the face of him who stood before Him,
 the Lord of three eyes graciously said:
 "We have made known your status
 to the three worlds;
 from now on do you unpartingly dwell
 in the age-old eternal world";
 Having said so, the Lord left that very instant
 and entered the nearby Ekambaram. 1204-127

* * *

"On a really clean table cloth,
 the smallest speck of dirt annoys the eye."

There was a speck of vanity in one of the servitors of
 God, and God, in His grace, willed to wash away that speck.

Of this servitor, Sundarar sings:
 "Servitor to the servitors of Thirukkuripputhondar
 am I".

and,

Nambi-andaar-nambi expands these too few words thus:

"If the clouds pouring rain
 which obstructs the means of drying
 the washed clothes
 of the kinsman, the devotee of the Lord,
 with the locks brimful with water,
 would not cease, I would die
 knocking my head against this strong flat stone."
 The caste of Thirukkurippuththondar
 of the eminence of saying thus
 is the ancient clan of washermen of Kaanchi.

* * *

(ii)

Of Amarneethi Naayanaar, another servitor of Lord Civan who was a little nonchalant about an article deposited with him by a devotee, Sundarar Sings:

"Servitor am I to Amarneethi,
 wearer of a beautiful garland of jasmine flowers
 of the Mullai variety with delicate petals"

* * *

and Nambi-andaar-nambi expands the same thus:

Amarneethi of Pazhaiyaarai
 teeming with groves
 was noted for the deed
 of giving away all his wealth, himself,
 and his wife of crescent moon like forehead
 to the Lord who wears stripes of sacred ash,
 saying, "Do graciously take all these
 as compensation for the loin-cloth
 You deposited with me long ago
 at Nalloor."

* * *

Amarneethi Nayanan of Pazhaiyaarai was a very prosperous weaver and merchant of cloth who made, as many other servitors did, his means of livelihood an avenue of service to the devotees of the Lord.

Thoughts he had for nothing else
 than the anklet-girt feet of Lord Civan.
 By feeding the devotees of the Lord

of the hue of the setting sun,
and, by intuiting their need,
giving waist-cloth, belt and loin-cloth to them,
he earned the fruits of the plenitude of wealth
which came to him from his business.

504-3

* * *

He settled down with his kith and kin in Thirunalloor, and besides conducting religious festivals on a grand scale, he established a Dharmasaala, a charitable inn where worthy devotees of the Lord could be fed. While he passed his days thus, one day,

The Lord of locks adorned
with the young shoot of a moon,
and of dark-stained throat,
with the object of exhibiting the greatness
of His loin-cloth in the first instance
and of subsequently conferring eternal grace
on His servitor full of love unto Him,
turned Himself into the appearance
of a celebrate of the Brahmana caste.

507-6

* * *

A sacred tuft of hair on the head
in place of the russet golden locks,
an abundance of the sheen
of the stripes of the white sacred ash
of the Caivite Faith on His body,
the white thread of many strands
along with the snippet of deer skin on His body,
and on His hand a ring of eternal purity
made of green Kusa grass.

508-7

* * *

On the waist was wound
a belt twisted from strands of Munji grass,
from which swung a loin-cloth
made of the refugees—the great Vedas:
His blossomy feet
which never desert the hearts of devotees
of minds dedicated to destroying the darkness (Aṇavam)
of perfidious mighty Karma,
added lustre to the vast earth.

509-8

* * *

Making minds melt with love at first sight,
 intent on exhibiting to the world
 the pure life of love led by His servitor,
 the Lord approached the inn of Amarneethiyaar
 bearing a staff to the top of which were tied
 a loin-cloth, sachet of sacred ash,
 and a sheaf of Kusa grass.

510-9

* * *

Amarneethi Nayanaar went forward and received the Brahmacari with joy and enquired how he could be of service to him. He begged the holy visitor to take food in his charitable inn, buttressing his request with the bait

that good Brahmanas of great Thavam
 might graciously take food in the inn,
 and that there was arrangement for suitable Brahmanas
 to cook the food.

513-12

* * *

Looking at the devotee
 who stood beseeching him,
 the Brahmana agreed and said:
 "Till I return from my bath
 in the waters of River Ponni, the dryad,
 keep this loin-cloth dry
 even if rain comes, and give it back to me".
 Saying so, he untied a white dry loin-cloth
 from his staff and gave it to him.

514-13

* * *

"There is no need for me to tell you here
 the indisputable greatness of this lofty loin-cloth;
 receive this and, till I return,
 keep it there without slighting it,"
 saying so, he gave it into his hands.

515-14

* * *

Amarneethi Nayanaar received the proffered loin-cloth and, keeping in mind the words of the Brahmana, thought of a safe place apart from the dhoti, belt, loincloths kept in stock for giving away, and kept it safely there.

The departing Brahmana,
did he make the deposited loin-cloth disappear,
and return after bathing in Ponni's ghat
teeming with blue-lotus?

Or did he come back after bathing
in the fragrant pure waters of the Ganges
locked in His matted locks?

In pouring rain drenched, he came back.

518-17

* * *

Desirous of bathing in the pure waters
of the River called the Love of the Devotee,
the Larcenist of the Loin-cloth said:

“I want to change the loin-cloth
wetted by diving in the surging cool waters,
but the loin-cloth on the staff too is wet;
therefore, the loin-cloth given by me,
do bring it here.”

520-19

* * *

Occasionally, devotees have called the Lord a thief; Samb-andhar, for instance, called him “Stealer of my heart”, The Rudram calls Him “Taskaranam Pataye”, ‘O Chief of Thieves’; but it was left to Sekkizhaar to call the Lord ‘Thief of the loin-cloth’.

Unaware of the ‘perfidy’ of the Lord, Amarneethi-Nayanaar went into the house to fetch the loin-cloth, but did not find it in the place where he had kept it. Getting more and more frantic with every passing moment, he searched high and low, asked men, women and children of the household, and finally came to the Lord to confess the loss of the loin-cloth, taking with him another loin-cloth as a substitute for the misplaced one. In doing so, he said unwittingly:

“Another good Kovanam—loin-cloth—
have I brought with love;
it is not a torn one; it is a woven one!
O Sire of forehead smeared
with shining sacred ash!
Divest yourself of the other one,
and wear this one,
and please forgive my offence”,
so said the servitor and prostrated
at the feet of the Lord.

525-24

* * *

The Brahmana who stood in front of him
flew into a rage, and roared:

"O Amarneethiyaar!
Fine indeed is the situation!
Not many days have passed
since I gave you the loin-cloth!
You have abstracted the loin-cloth
I deposited with you this very day;
and you have the check to offer
another in its place and ask me to accept it!"

526-25

* * *

"Was it for the perfidious purpose
of abstracting my Kovanam
that you have been broadcasting for days
in all the world
that you would give a new Kovanam?
The smart business transacted by you here
well suits you!"
Thus raged the Lord,
his eyes scattering sparks of fire all around.

527-29

* * *

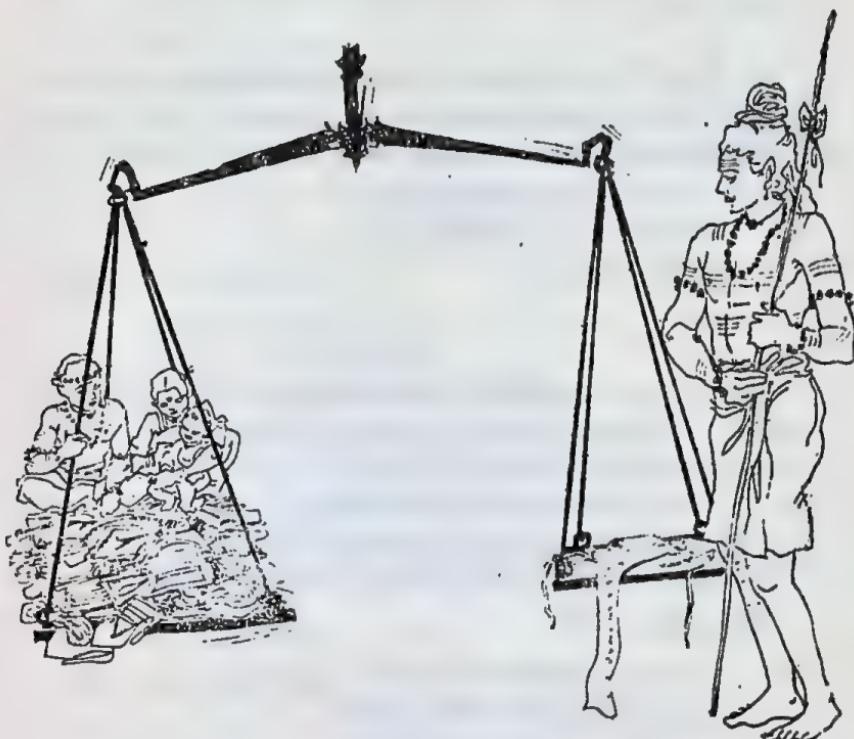
The shamed servitor submissively offered every kind of compensation including all the bales of cloth in his stock. Finally, disgruntedly accepting the offer, the bogus Brahmana imposed a condition.

"Apart from the Kovanam I am wearing
and the one I gave into your hands,
and which you say to my face
that you have lost,
here is one matching that torn Kovanam";
saying so, he untied a third one from the staff,
and bade him thus:
"Place on the scales another Kovanam
equal to the weight of this one!"

532-31

Amarneethi Nayanaar thought lightly of the Kovanam he was asked to match weight for weight, and placing it on one of the pans of his scale threw into the other another Kovanam out of his huge stock. Surprised at the pan containing the Kovanam offered by the Lord not rising even a millimetre, and noticing the needle slanted as before without moving even a fraction of a millimetre

towards the centre, he piled Kovanam over Kovanam with amusement to begin with, which turned to puzzlement and finally changed to panic. When, even after piling all his stock of cloth and perhaps, of yarn too, all his silver and gold, the needle still stood at the



same slant, in desperation, he decided to ascend along with his entire family to the top of the piled bales. As they were all settling down on the bales he sang:

“If, in the act of love performed by us,
it is true that we have never failed in the least
in our true serfdom to the sacred ash which we wear,
let these large pans stand equipoised!”

Saying so, he paid his obeisance
to the Lord abiding in Thirunalloor
of rain-fed tanks and luscious groves,
chanted the flourishing Five Letters,
and on to the pan he ascended.

When the rest of his family had ascended on to the top of the pan, the pans stood on an equal level and the needle stood straight pointing to the sky where now the bogus Brahmana stood in His true ancient form which He patronises, and gave a beatific vision of Himself and the Devi who has appropriated one half of His body.

When and where and how did Amarneethi Nayanaar exhibit his nonchalance? Sekkizhaar provides us the answer when he puts the following words into the mouth of Amarneethi Nayanaar:

“I have lovingly brought you
another good Kovanam;
a torn one it is not; it has been woven
on the loom!”

525-24

* * *

The thoughts which had dwelt in his mind from the very moment he received the much worn-out Kovanam for custody now escaped from his lips. To him, from the very beginning, it was a worn-out and torn and shabby Kovanam, and he kept it safe in a place away from his own stock, perhaps, more out of the disdain he felt for the cloth than from a motive of ensuring its safety.

Thiruvalluvar said:

“Do not despise anyone on account of his small form;
the world contains many persons
who are like the small lynchpin
to the huge rolling Juggernaut”.

667

* * *

We may extend the scope of this Kural to cover the cloth covering the loins of a devotee of the Lord.

* * *

(iii)

There lived in the ancient City of Thillai (modern Chidambaram), a servitor who belonged to the guild of potters. He was given by Sundarar the second place in the calendar of the servitors of God. He sang:

"To servitors of the servitors of the Thillai-dwelling
 Brahmanas, servitor am I;
 To Thiruneelakandar, the Potter as well,
 servitor am I."

* * *

It may not be by design that Sundarar gave the potter's name the second place in the calendar of sixty servitors of the Lord; for that calendar is a potpourrie of names strung together just as they came to his mind. It is possible that this name occurred to his mind on account of the undercurrent of memory which reminded him that the Potter too hailed from Thillai.

Of him Sekkizhaar sings:

Pottery, a craft hereditarily handed down
 innumerable generations,
 making it the means of his livelihood,
 and
 to the devotees of the Dancer in the Hall
 with a chaplet of a waxing baby moon,
 always abundantly giving away alms-bowls
 to his great joy,
 while he led his life in this manner,
 on account of the sap of youth coursing through his
 veins,
 he made a fool of himself
 in the region of sensual pleasures.

362-3

* * *

Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal sang: "Even if I were to slip and fall down, I do not know of any word of ejaculation other than Your sacred name, Na-Ma-Chi-Vaa-Ya."

O You Who assumed Lordship over those
 who, if they uttered anything at all,
 uttered and uttered,
 "Eesan! O my Father!
 O Great Lord of my forefathers!"

* * *

What Manikkavaachakar and Sundarar affirmed is a declaration of the unequivocal surrender of one's free will to God's will, not

as an expedient or an unavoidable necessity, but as a voluntary, a spontaneous and joyous surrender. "Not my will, but Thy will!" is what these saints mean when they use the name of God as an ejaculation. The servitor of this chronicle also was in the habit of using such an ejaculation. The word on his lips ever and always was "Thiruneelakantam", 'O Holy Lord of the blue-tinted throat", a word which constantly reminded him of the supreme act of compassion of Lord Civan in swallowing the poison which the sea threw up when it was churned for nectar, the Elixir of Life. This is the most ancient of all vicarious sacrifices ever performed by God on behalf of humanity. Lord Civan contained the poison in His throat which turned blue as a consequence. Our potter himself, on account of this habit of ever using the word "Thiruneelakantam" came to be known as Thiruneelakanta-Naayanaar.

His wife surpassed Arunthathi in the virtue of chastity. When her husband frequented the house of a prostitute in the town, unable to bear the shame thereof, she went into a sulk, and though continuing to discharge all the duties of a housewife, she denied him physical relationship. Sekkizhaar relates:

364-5

One day, on her husband returning home
after having been to the prostitute's house,
due to the sulks which came upon her
as she was not able to bear the shame,
she began to perform her housewifely duties
as ever before,
but did not consent to any bodily contact;
thus did she lovelier in form
than Lakshmi seated on the lotus of honeyed petals.

* * *

With a desire to put an end to the estrangement
which had arisen between them,
our honourable devotee went before her
who resembled a golden creeper,
and before whose youthful fresh beauty
ornaments hung back,
and when, having begged for the-sought for
forbearance and pardon,
he approached to hug her body,
she cried out;
"By the name of Thiruneelakantam
I swear that if you would touch us..."

365-6

* * *

She left her threat unfinished, rousing unknowable fears in our devotee, the potter. He promptly respected and responded to the ban in the name of Thiruneelakantam. Sekkizhaar records:

Our great man,
who heard the command
which he could not break
on account of the depth of the ardour
he bore to Neelakantar, the Primordial Being,
stepped back,
and, staring at her as at a stranger, responded:
“Since you said ‘us’,
touch I will not even by thought,
besides you, all other women as well!”

366-7

* * *

The wife of outstanding chastity
continued to cherishingly serve all the needs
of her husband barring physical contact.
Now, they never went outside their house
in each other's company,
and, inside the house,
they slept in separate bedrooms
without loving intercourse.
Thus they led their life without the neighbours
knowing anything about it.

367-8

* * *

Thus years passed till they lost their youth, and age advanced on them. Though they leaned forward on account of weakness as they walked, they never leaned backward in the quality of their love towards their Lord.

While they led their lives in this manner, their Lord, with intent to exhibit to the world the true quality of His devotee and to hold it up to the world as an ideal to follow, hid the signs of His classic form and came to the doors of the house of His servitor in the guise of a person with a tousled mass of hair and sacred-ash smeared body, clad in the well-known Kovanam, and holding in his hand an alms-bowl of a cleanly picked skull surpassing in its whiteness the moonlight. Thiruneelakantar went forward and received him ceremoniously with joy and awaited his commands.

He addressed him thus:

"O my Lord!
 What service could I render You?"
 Thus asked, the servitor of the Lord of matted locks
 decked with fragrant Kondrai flowers,
 the Lord of the heaven-dwellers replied:
 "This alms-bowl I shall leave with you,
 O Trustworthy Man!
 Do give it back to us
 when we want it". Saying so,

374-15

* * *

He continued:

"Equal to it there is naught!
 Everything deposited inside it,
 pure it transforms;
 it must be cherished more carefully
 than gems and gold;
 of such merit it is; receive it!"

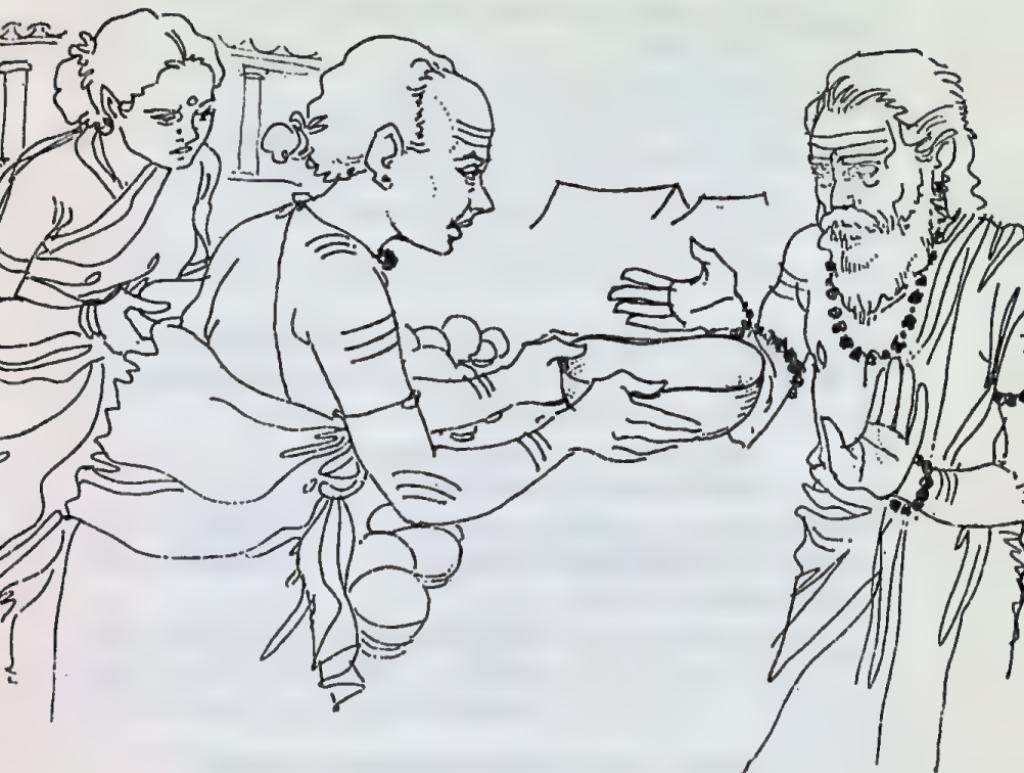
375-6

* * *

Our servitor, the potter, received it reverently, hastened into the house, deposited it in a safe place, and returned to the Lord who had come in the guise of a Yogi. On His departure, our servitor accompanied Him a few steps, and, after bidding Him adieu, returned to his home.

Several days later, the Lord returned, Sekkizhaar tells us after having made the alms-bowl he had deposited with the potter to disappear from the place where it had been safely deposited by the servitor. And to him who again very ceremoniously received Him, He curtly said: "The very shiny alms-bowl which I left with you on that long ago day, fetch it, and then stand before me." He went in with confidence and returned with dismay to confess that he could not find it where he had carefully kept it or anywhere else. Addressing the Brahmana he pleaded:

O my Father of chest
 adorned by the sacred thread of several
 strands!
 the covetable alms-bowl,
 I cannot find it where I kept or elsewhere;
 in place of the old one



I shall give another good vessel;
please receive it
and forgive this mishap,
O Magnanimous One!

* * *

At the servitor standing before him, the Brahmana looked with scornful eyes and said: "Even if you offer me an alms-bowl made of gold, I will not accept anything but my alms-bowl of baked mud. Go and come back with the one I deposited with you."

The servitor only added fuel to the fire when he repeated his offer and said:

"Another good alms-bowl
which will serve you for a long time,
I shall give you."

* * *

On hearing these words the enraged Brahmana swore:
"What next?

You have abstracted the object
I left with you for safe custody.

You have committed many heinous acts,
and you do not blanch at the black infamy of it all!
Without rounding up you and your family
and taking you all along with me,
I shall not leave this place!"

Thus said He who stood as an ideal for virtue. 385-26

* * *

On the servitor further protesting his innocence, and asking what he should do to prove his innocence of theft even in his thoughts, the Lord, devoid of any fiendishness, bade him thus:

"Hold the hands of your beloved son
and dive into this pond and rise."

When the servitor said that he had no son, he was bidden to hold the hand of his wife and dive into the pond. The servitor submissively said:

"On account of a vow binding us both, it is not possible for us to hold hands and dive together, I shall singly dive and give my word." At this the Brahmana got enraged and spluttered in wrath:

Neither do you give back what I gave you before;
nor, as proof of your not stealing it,
do you dive in the wave-tossed waters
holding the rosy tender hand of your wife;
you have steeled your heart;
I shall go before the sacred assembly-hall
in which the Thillai-dwelling Brahmans
are assembled.

389-30

* * *

With the Brahmana leading the way, the servitor followed as the accused.

The Brahmana, our Father and Lord,
before the Brahmans laid His plaint;
"The vessel which I deposited
with this potter would he neither return,
nor, if he had lost it, would he give his word
by holding the hand of his wife
and dive in the pond;
he is wantonly wilful."

391-32

* * *

The Thillai-dwelling Brahmanas turned to our servitor and asked him what he had to say in his defence. He explained at length what happened. The court decided that it is but proper that he carried out the wishes of the holy plaintiff. Our servitor could not tell them why he could not touch his wife; so, he returned home followed by the Muni of great Thavam. Accompanied by his wife and the plaintiff, he arrived at the bank of the tank and entered the waters, with his wife, each holding on to the end of a stick. When the Brahmana, with all his body covered with stripes of the sacred ash, insisted on their holding hands, he told him, in the hearing of all the world the story of his ancient deed, and dived along with his wife into the waters of the tank.

The husband and wife,
ascended to the bank after diving in the waters,
rid of the agedness
and restored to their desire-rousing youthfulness.
They seemed as if they were diving again,
this time in the great divine downpour of flowers
which the Devas and Munis
were showering on them.

398-39

* * *

All those who saw the marvel
of the sight the couple presented
did not see the Cause of the Vedas
who had stood before them;
they stood puzzled
what this state of affairs meant;
then they saw Him in the sky above
accompanied by His Consort
and mounted on the bull.

399-40

* * *

Where was the complacency, the taint of vanity of craftsmanship which had to be washed away? When he offered a substitute for the lost alms-bowl, he had forgotten what the Lord had said of the uniqueness of the lost article.

"Equal to it there is naught;
everything deposited inside it,
pure it transforms!"

The words were, ominous when we recall them. The second mistake lay in saying:

"In place of the old one
I will give another good vessel."

* * *

In the context of the ominous words, "Equal to it there is naught; everything deposited in it, pure it transforms," the words 'old' and 'good' were unhappily chosen. Another mistake followed. "Another good almsbowl which will serve you for a long time, I shall give you," were words which cast unspoken aspersion on the bowl, "equal to which there was naught, everything deposited in it, pure it transforms." This taint was washed away when the couple dived into the waters of the sacred tank in Thillai.

7. CONSORT WITH DEVOTEES

(Clause 2 of Soothram 12 of Civagnaanabodham)

“Consort with devotees (who have apprehended the Reality)”

Thus commands and commends the Civagnaana-bodham in the second clause of the Twelfth Aphorism. Perumizhalai-kurumba-nayanar, Somaasi-marra-nayanar, and Gananatha-nayanar did just that and gained Mukti.

Of Perumizhalai-k-kurumbar Sundarar sang:

“Servitor am I to Perumizhalar k-kurumbar and..... as well”.

Nambi-andaar-nambi expanded these all too few words into a four-line stanza which is a model precis of the life of the Nayanaar.

He sang:

“Just as waters of a river
imprisoned between banks
reaches the sea,
the Prince of Naavaloor will reach tomorrow
the benignant feet of the Lord
of Kailas teeming with fauna and flora.
In order to congratulate him
on the grace he has received,
today itself I shall arrive at the feet of Him
with the benefic crown
adorned by a crescent moon.”
Saying so, from his body parted he,
the loyal man called Mizational-k-kurumban
adorned by a garland
of honey-laden flowers.

*

*

*

Mizational was the capital town of a petty chieftain. It lay at about 32 miles to south of Thiruchirapalli. Its chieftains were called Kurumbars. Hence, this servitor of Lord Civan was known as the Great Kurumbar of Mizational. Recent research scholars are said to identify this place as a village going under the name of

Mizhalari in Kumbakonam taluk. In nine stanzas Sekkizhaar expands Nambiandar-nambi's one stanza. He sings:

In that ancient sacred city,
its chieftain, Mizhalai-k-kurumbanar
was in the habit of going forward
and welcoming the devotees of the Lord
who keeps a crescent moon on His crown,
and of intuiting in advance
and long before they could say
such and such were the services they needed,
and of performing those services.

1707-2

* * *

Servitors many came,
he served them food
till they could eat no more,
he scooped up vast sums of money
and gave it to take with them,
and behaved with humility towards them.,.
Such was the person
who had as his rule of life
cherishing in the blossom of his heart,
the lotus-blossom called the rosy feet
of the Consort of Uma of tresses
over which bees hover.

1708-3

* * *

During the days he led his life in this manner,
that the world might know
the true nature of boundless holy servitude,
he worshipped (Sundarar) the Man of Faith—
who paid obeisance to the Servitors of God
and sang the Thiru-th-thonda-th-thokai
dear to the hearts of true devotees—
and excelled in the routine
of meditating on the feet of the Servitors
who had gained the grace of the Eternal Being.

1709-4

* * *

Believing that discharge of the duty
of worshipping with joined palms,
praising with the mouth
and meditating with the mind
the anklet-girt blossom feet

of the husband of Paravaiyar
 of collyrium-tinted wide eyes.
 is the apt pathway to reach and abide
 under the red-golden twin feet
 not known by the Spouse of Lakshmi
 or the Four-faced Brahma,
 he lovingly conducted himself accordingly.

1710-4

* * *

After the ability to wield the Yogic powers
 of 'Anima' and others had come to him
 as reward for chanting daily
 the name of Nambi-Aaroorar,
 with a burning desire soaring up,
 he arrived at a stage of having gained
 as his kin, wealth, and spiritual experience
 the Five Letters which constitute the name
 of the Primordial Being.

1711-6

* * *

While he was conducting himself here thus,
 Vanthondar,
 whom Lord Civan—
 who bore aloft a flag
 bearing an emblem of a bull—
 enslaved by coming down on earth
 with His anklet-girt golden feet
 treading the ground,
 and lodging a complaint
 and displaying an eternal palm-scroll
 before an assembly,
 arrived at Kodungkaloor
 teeming with mansions
 the tops of which were grazed by the moon.

1712-7

* * *

Sundarar, who was approaching Anjaikkalam,
 singing the praises of Lord Civan,—
 the Ambrosia who ate the poison—
 as a result of composing and reciting
 garlands of pocsy in pure Tamil,
 clearly felt in his heart,
 by the grace of the Lord of the Devas,
 the life in cloud-capped Mount Kailas
 in the north

which was awaiting him.

And, simultaneously, here at far off Mizhalai,
Kurumbanar intuited the same.

1713-9

* * *

Kurumbanar thought within himself,
“While Vanthondar,
who was born on earth in famous Thirunaavaloor,
reaches the unapproachable Kailas tomorrow,
parted from him, I shall not live
like people who live after having lost
the pupils of their eyes,”
and said: “Lord Civan’s feet today itself
I shall reach by the power of Yoga.”

1714-11

* * *

After unifying the four instruments of knowledge,
and taking the help of good wisdom,
on the will directing the luminous life-breath
through the main spinal cord,
the vertex of the skull was opened suitably
through the power of the long-since practised method
of properly chanting the Pranava;
and through that opening (the soul of)
Kurumbanar arrived at the sacred feet
of the Primordial Being at Kayilai
long before Sundarar arrived there.

1715-10

* * *

Such was the quality of the servitorship to the servitors of the Lord. Sundarar, in his Thiru-th-thonda-th-thokai, often said that he was servitor to the servitor of a servitor of Lord Civan. Peru-mizhalai-kurumbanar lived up to that declaration of his ideal, Sundarar.

This short chronicle of no more than eleven stanzas has two special features. This is the only chronicle in which a saint of Tamilnadu other than Thirumoolar used a Yogic power to gain an end. There is no evidence in any of the four chronicles in which Sundarar’s life is recorded that Kurumbanar ever met Sundarar. If Eyarkon Kalikkamanar was a saint who hated Sundarar without meeting him in person and preferred to end his life than meet him, here was a saint who preferred to end his life rather than live after

Sundarar had left the earth. The lives of the saints in Periyapuram are varied in as many ways as there are saints in that chronicle, but all were characterised by the unique quality of a love which is more than human.

(ii)

Somasi-marra-naayanar was another servitor of Sundaramoorthi-Swaamikal, the servitor of the servitors of God. Of him Sekkizhaar sings just five stanzas reminding us of the Five Letters which Somasi-marrar never ceased to repeat in his waking hours and never ceased to dream of in his sleeping hours. Sekkizhaar sings:

In Ambar noted for its groves
in which mango trees abounded,
an eminent person was he
in the clan of Brahmanas
who studied the pure and true Vedas.
Of devotees to the Lord,
who destroyed the fortresses inimical to Him,
came
he excelled in the good quality of character
of worshipping their feet
and of feeding choice food to them.

3630-1

* * *

As a fruit of the blessings
gained by performing Yaagas
(oblations in sacrificial fires)
without departing from
the age-long prescribed procedure,
to the delight of the seven worlds,
as acts of obeisance
to the unique Partner of Her of speech
sweeter than the music of the Yaazh,
he came to the conclusion and declared
that the way of leading one's life
is to praise the anklet-girt blossomy feet
of the Lord.

3031-2

* * *

He held that

"Whatever be their nature or status,
if they are devotees of the Lord,

people of such nature
are my rulers."

As a means of gaining clarity of mind,
he observed the principle of worship
which cherished as a daily routine
the oral exercise of repeating the Five Letters
which spell the name of Lord Civan.

3632-3

* * *

He went to Thiruvaaroor
spilling with prosperity and piety,
and notably gained by power of his love
the great friendship
of the personal attendant of Lord Civan—
Vanthondar of chest adorned by
chains of gold and strings of pearls.
He stayed there clinging to his feet
which the earth and the heavens worship.

3633-4

* * *

He gained the bliss
of abiding in the eternal Civalokam—
the World of Civan,
when he gained the glory
resulting from worshipping the feet of Vanthondar,
after having concluded firmly
that such worship and no other
was the enlightened way
of gaining victory over the five senses
and the associated six foibles,
namely, lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy,
and arriving at the good Pathway to God.

3634-5

* * *

Of this servitor Sundarar sang:

"Servitor am I to the man from Ambar-
Somasi-Marrar."

And Nambi-andaar-nambi expanded thus:

The Brahmana of Ambar
girt by groves of mango-trees,
Somasi-marran by name:
he uttered repeatedly
nothing but the Five Letters,

A man of a daily routine
as prescribed by the litany
which leads one to the Transcendent Being,
he was a delightful companion
to Vanthondan, the beloved of the lady called Paravai.

* * *

Again we are obliged to observe that this Servitor is not mentioned by Sekkizhaar in any of the four chronicles which deal with the life of Sundarar.

Feeding the devotees of Lord Civan, chanting the Five Letters, and servitude to a servitor of Lord Civan are the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. But they are so only when they are imbued with a love more than human, a love which is man-oriented as well as God-oriented.

(iii)

Gananathar was the chief of the clan of Brahmanas in Seekaazhi, the birthplace of Thirugnaanasambandhar. Of him Sundarar sang:

“Servitor to Gananathan
of Kaazhi on the seacoast am I”.

Nambi-andaar-nambi, as is usual with him, gives a precis of the servitor's biography in a stanza of four lines. Even if we did not have Sekkizhaar's 'Periya-Puraanam', a perceptive reader could construct the life of a servitor from the stanza devoted to him by Nambi-andar-nambi who never omits any essential detail of the servitor. On quite a few occasions, Sekkizhaar takes a whole phrase out of such a stanza and sets it in his own stanza just as a jeweller sets a gem in a gold setting. Nambi-andar-nambi sings:

He trained servitors,
and assigned to each a job
for which he was suited.
By this service he gained the position
of Chief of the Host of Ghouls of Civan,
the Lord of the Devas.
Such was Gananathan of Kaazhi
on the sea-coast where the Kumuda flowers
offered white rice-balls to lightning,
the Damsel who rose up to the sky
riding on the rain-clouds.

* * *

Gananathan was the name this servitor was given posthumously after he had gained the post of Chief of the Host of Ghouls. Let Sekkizhaar relate the rest of the life of this servitor.

He sings:

This devotee daily did with dedicated love
beneficent sacred services
suitable to the boat-seated great Lord
abiding in Senbai of gem-set ramparts.
In addition to being famed for such service,
to those who voluntarily came to him,
he gave training
in pure and sacred manual service
in various fields.

3924-2

*

Good flower-garden workers,
gatherers of clusters of fragrant flowers,
stringers of garlands of many flowers,
persons needed to fetch water
for the ritualistic bath of the Lord,
sweepers and scrubbers
of the premises of the temple
day and night,
lighters of unlimited number of lamps,
copyists of the Thirumurais
and readers thereof in the assemblage of devotees.

3925-2

*

In such several sacred services
he trained those who came to him
each in service as suited him,
and he fulfilled all their wants
that they might shine in their performance.
By carrying out this kind of project
he created a large band of devoted servants.
He led a love-imbued life of a true house-holder,
and excelled in the art of bringing delight
to the devotees by the manner
of his worshipful service to them.

3926-4

*

Our servitor of such great fame,
impelled by a surging love
of the anklet-girt feet
of Gnaanasambandhar of Kaazhi of ever growing glory,
who fed on the true great sacred gnosis
(the milk drawn from the breast
of the Mother of all creation)

daily and unfailingly performed
worship of those feet three times a day
with welling love,
to the great delight of his heart
which swelled with peerless devotion.

3927-5

* * *

Our great devotee
engaged in such service,
having gained for ever in this vast world
the fruits of worshipping the lotus-like feet
of him who had fed on gnosis,
reached the resplendent tall Kailas Mount
of the Lord with crown
adorned by pure fragrant Kondrai flowers
and gained the gift
of everlasting Chieftainship .
of the proud and mighty Ghouls
of blessed state.

3928-6

(iv)

Viranmendar was another servitor to the servitors of the servitors of Lord Civan, but with a unique difference. The three servitors mentioned earlier in this chapter were servitors of their contemporaries, one of them a servitor of Thirugnaana-sambandhar, and two others of Sundarar. Viranmendar, on the other hand, was a servitor of all the servitors of Lord Civan from time immemorial to his own days.

Viranmendar hailed from Thiruchchengundroor, now going under the name of Sengannoor and situated about four hours' walk from Quilon in the present Kerala State. In one stanza Sekkizhaar sums up the essential details of Viranmendar's birth and his life's ideals. He sings:

In that beautiful city he took birth
to bring glory to the clan of Velaalars;
attaching himself to Lord Civan's feet
of ineffable glory,
he discarded totally
all other attachments;
he had a special affection
towards persons of true devotion
the limits of which cannot be gauged;
such was Viranmendar.

494-4

* * *

Impelled by a wander-lust, specially to worship at famous shrines of God, he travelled from shrine to shrine, paying homage first to bands of the Lord's servitors of ripe devotion, and worshipping the Lord only later on. In due course, he arrived at Thiruvaroor. Sekkizhaar recounts what happened there.

Noticing Vanthondar

who was sidling away without coming up to
and worshipping the servitors of Lord Civan
who were resplendently assembled
in Devaaasriyan of sacred fame,
Viranmindar said: "You are excommunicated!"
It was by the grace of Lord Civan,
that he obtained this unending and great privilege;
and he stood to gain more privilege.

497-7

* * *

On his saying "excommunicated you are!" to Ooran,
who was going away
without paying his respects
to the galaxy of servitors of Lord Civan
who bent as a bow the lofty Meru Mountain,
and also to the wearer of the crescent moon
and the snake in place of a jewel
who stood in the position of Sovereign
to Vanthondar,
he, Viranmindar, received from Him
unwavering grace,
What other greatness could one say
of anyone?

498-8

* * *

When Sundarar promptly sang
the Thiru-th-thonda-th-thokai
in the presence of the devotees gathered in the Devaaasriyan
that the world, we, and the glory
of the Pathway to God of splendid Caivism
might be redeemed,
if He, who could not be realised
by the perfect Vedas which wailed to know Him,
responded, saying:: "We can be found in the company
of Our devotees."
who indeed are there
who have fully known the greatness
of the devotees of the Lord
who took the poison as verily ambrosia?

499-9

* * *

After spending several more years on earth, Viranmindar finally gained the privilege of becoming a Chief of the Host of Ghouls of Lord Civan, and of living in the haven of the Lord's feet. Sekkizhaar concludes:

What more is there to say?
 Is it within my powers
 to tell the greatness of Viranmindar, my Lord,
 who was the cause of the fortunate incident
 by which the world came to be famous
 for the Thiru-th-thonda-th-thokai?

501-11

* * *

In the above named poem, Sundarar sings thus of Viranmindar:

"Servitor am I to Viranmindar,
 the resident of Kundraiyoor
 girt by sprawling groves"

* * *

And Nambi-andaar-nambi sings:

He who said, 'Excommunicated you are' to Aarooran,
 noted for speaking the greatness of the servitors,
 and also to Eesan, Aarooran's Lord,
 he who was a devotee to that same Eesan,
 he who was my Lord too,
 he is Viranmindar indeed
 who abode in sacred Sengkundru
 girt by groves
 through which blows the steady southern breeze
 which enters homes a long way off.

"God she may not worship,
 but she rises from bed worshipping her husband.
 If she says 'Pour', rain will pour down!"

Thus said Thiruvalluvar of the ideal wife. If we suitably change the Kural and say:

God they may not worship,
 but they rise worshipping the servitors of God;
 if they say, "Pour", rain will pour down,
 it will be perfectly true of the devotees who worshipped
 the servitors
 of the servitors of God.

From the chronicles of these four saints, we can understand why Sundarar sang repeatedly that he was a "Servitor to the servitors" of several servitors of Lord Civan. Such remote servitude of as many as three removes is enough to secure admission to the Kingdom of Heaven.

8. DEATH BE NOT PROUD

(Clause 3a of the 12th Soothram of Civagnaanabodham, — “Worship the Guise of Devotees of Maran as Haran Himself”).

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.
From Rest and Sleep, which but thy picture be,
Much pleasure, then, from thee much more must flow;
And sooner our better men with thee do go—
Rest of their bones and soul’s delivery!
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke. Why swellest thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die!

* * *

Thus sang John Donne, an English mystic of the 16th-17th centuries. Long before him, as early as the 1st century B.C., Thiruvalluvar, the Law-giver of Tamilnadu, said:

Death is sinking into slumber deep.
Birth again is waking out of sleep.

In our twentieth century, Khalil Gibran sang:

“For life and death are one,
even as the river and sea are one.

.....
And what is it to cease breathing
but to free the breath from its restless tides
that it may rise and expand
and seek God unencumbered.”

* * *

What an unanimity in the beginning, middle and end of two thousand years! Our saints too, Civan’s devotees as they were,

held death as sweeter than life when to live would be a dishonour, and to die would be eternal glory.

When Poet Donne sang: "Those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow, die not, poor Death!", he stated a great truth, a truth which cowards and poltroons who die a thousand deaths each day do not realise, a truth which Meypporul Nayanar, Pukazhch-cola-nayanar and Enathinayanar realised so well that they joyously laid down their lives rather than take the life of one in the guise of a devotee of Lord Civan, though the guise housed in two cases the most perfidious of men.

(i)

Of Meypporulnaayanaar, Sundarar sang:

"To Meypporul,
very well versed in ways of gaining victory,
servitor am I!"

And Nambi-andaar-nambi paid his homage to him in these words:

People say that it was Meypporul, Lord of Chedi,
who said, "O Thaththa! He is one of us!"
and gained the Kingdom of Heaven,
when Thaththa was about to kill
the man of perfidious conduct
who, coming up like a learned man of saintly conduct,
killed him out of burning hatred.

* * *

Sekkizhaar sings in twenty-four stanzas how Meypporul-nayanar lived up to the 12th aphorism of Civa-gnaanabodham which enjoins on Caiva-siddhaanthis the obligation to worship a devotee as Lord Civan Himself. Sekkizhaar sings:

Established in age-long Thirukkovalloor
of prosperous Sethi Country,
Malaadars' King,
who came of a family of hereditary devotion
to the Lord who has a Devi on one side of Him,
led such a noble life
that the verity of the excellent Pathway to God
ordained by the Vedas
might thereby be manifest to everyone,
and
served the devotees of the Lord
intuiting their needs by the power of his love.

467-1

* * *

He unswervingly followed the righteous path
 enjoined by the code of kingship
 and
 changed enemies into allies
 by the might of his crag-like shoulders;
 he, moreover, excelled in the quality
 of upholding justice
 without swerving from the uttered code,
 and
 contemplated ever and always on the guise
 of the devotees of the Lord with matted locks
 which contained the wave-tossed waters.

468-2

* * *

He ensured
 that daily services
 continued to be held everywhere
 in all the temples where abides the Lord
 with a Devi on His side,
 and
 that song and dance were prominent features
 of grand festivals,
 and lived as Protector of the Faith.
 Other than to the feet of the devotees of his Suzerain,
 attachment he had none.

469-3

* * *

With a mind established in the conviction
 that all the riches acquired by him
 and the legacy lineally come down to him
 did belong only to the devotees of the Lord
 dancing in the Hall in Thillai,
 he was in the habit of giving gifts to them
 unstintingly
 with delight welling up in him
 at their having come to him.

470-4

* * *

While thus he conducted himself,
 a neighbouring king conceived enmity towards him,
 and
 impelled by a desire to win victory over him,
 undertook a war against him.
 Elephants with foreheads adorned with golden pendants,
 fighting-mad chargers, foot-soldiers galore,
 he lost again and again.
 Defeated thus, he became disgraced.

471-5

* * *

The thus defeated enemy,
unable to win by war,
well-knowing the principles of life
of King Meipporul,
conceived the unmentionable plan
of gaining victory over him by perfidy
through assuming the noble guise
of a person who wears the white ash,
and
set out for Thirukkovaloor.

472-6

* * *

His body smeared all over with the ash,
his locks tied up in a bunch on top of his head,
his hand holding a scroll
which concealed within a dagger,
harbouring black hatred in his heart
even as a flame of light has a dark core,
and
assuming the false guise of a saintly man,
into the town entered Muththanathan.

473-7

* * *

Thus disguised, the man of hatred-harbouring heart, walked
down the streets of the town and arrived at the gates of the palace
of Meipporul.

He passed through many gates,
with the guards thereat standing aside
with palms joined in worship
and saying:
“Verily, Lord Civan Himself
who has us for slaves has come,”

But Thatthan who stood at the special gate said:

“Let me ascertain his convenience;
you may bless him then;
the King is now having a nap.”

475-9

* * *

On hearing him say so,
Muththanathan said:

"You too stand aside
 that I may impart to him
 the knowledge of the Eternal Verities,"
 and, pushing him aside, he entered the chamber,
 and found the king asleep on the golden cot,
 with his consort of fragrant tresses and lissom form
 seated by his side.

476-10

* * *

Even when after seeing this,
 he was approaching the bedstead,
 the queen suddenly slipped down, to the ground;
 and

on her waking the king
 with garlands over which bees were hovering,
 he grasped the situation,
 and, taking the intruder to be a devotee
 of the Lord of the universe,
 rose with his rosy palms joined over his head,
 and went forward,
 and stood paying obeisance
 in accordance with his principles of conduct.

477-11

* * *

On the King asking:

"What could be the purpose
 that you have graciously gone over here
 as if the fruit of the life led by me
 has come that well-being may swell in my life?"
 the other replied:

"That I might instruct you in it.
 I have brought a book
 unavailable anywhere on earth—
 an Aagama uttered in the past
 by your Lord Civan!"

478-12

* * *

"Greater blessing than this
 could there be for me?
 Do graciously read out to me
 this unparalleled Aagama
 graciously created by my Lord."
 When, in reply to these words of the King,

he said:

"The lady with the fragrant garland
should be excluded,
and you and I should be in a secluded place",
the King,

479-13

* * *

looking at his Queen
who stood by looking like goddess Lakshmi herself,
readily bade her go quickly
to the inner apartments,
and, installing the man who had assumed
the garb of an ascetic
on a seat,
paid obeisance to him, and said:
"Now, do bestow your grace."

481-14

* * *

The deceitful devotee placed on his lap
the perfidious roll in his hand,
and, pretending to unfurl the scroll,
extracted the weapon,

and,

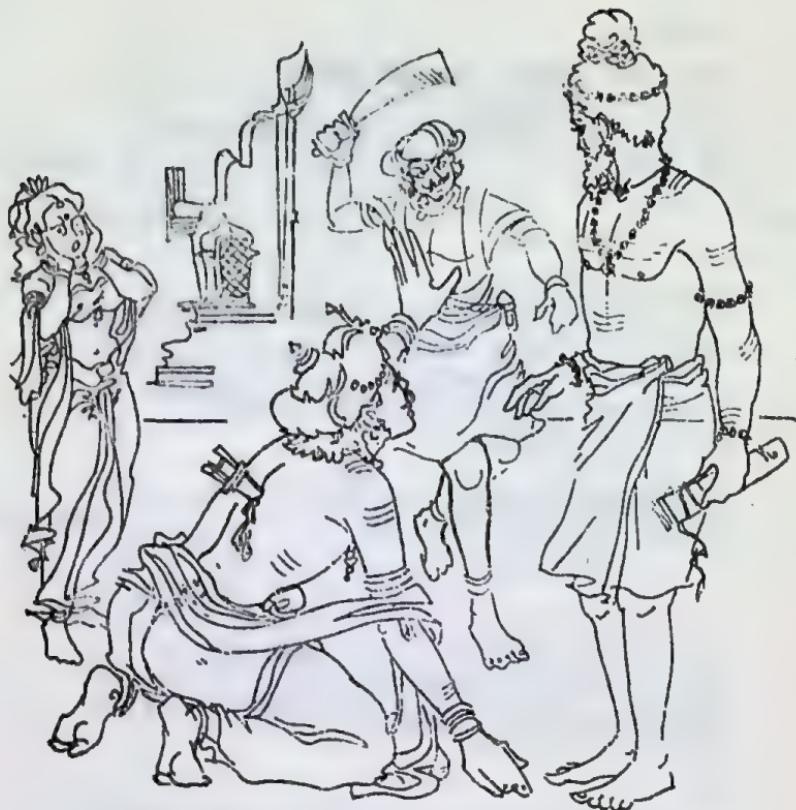
while the suppliant submissively bowed to him,
carried out his design
exactly as he had thought it out before.
Instantly, the King proclaimed:
"(Anyone in the) guise of true asceticism
is verily the Real Being!",

and victory gained.

481-15

* * *

Thaththan, who had kept his attention on the chamber,
from the time the person
who had hidden his design entered it,
came on the scene in an instant,
and was about to smite him with his sword
when
the king, staggering with blood streaming
from his body,
stretched his hand
even as he was sinking to the ground,



and stayed the sword,
simultaneously shouting,
“Thaththa! Nammar!”
“Thaththa! He is one of us!”,
and smote the ground.

4982-15

* * * *

Devoted Thaththan,
who had been deterred by the King,
who, smitten by suffering,
had smote the ground,
bowed down to his ban, and asked:
“What shall I do?”

The King replied:

“Take him along with you in such a manner
that this devotee of my Lord
is not prevented from going away,
and leave him outside the city.”

483-17

* * * *

All those who had learnt about this incident, when they surrounded the deceitful devotee on all sides, shouting:

"Him, the false ascetic,
who caused evil unto our King,
we will kill,"

Thaththan, who prevented all of them from doing so,
and took him along, said:

"That which enables this ascetic to get away,
is the King's command."

484-18

* * *

Abiding by that,
while all of them,
in fear, stood out of the way, and left,
Thaththan, with drawn sword held aloft in hand,
went across the sacred city
through the main streets,
and, arriving at a forest unfrequented by men,
left the cruel fellow of the fell deed,
and returned.

485-19

* * *

Thaththan, who abided by his monarch's instructions,
went before his King
and stood in the line of vision of him
who was holding on to his ebbing life
in order to hear from Thaththan
the reassuring words
about removing out of his way
those who were enraged
with the man of perfidious guise
whom he was escorting,
and about leaving him in a harm-free route.

486-20

* * *

On his going before the King
he bowed at his feet and said:
"Without any harm coming to him on the way,
I escorted and left him—
him who overpowered you
by assuming the guise of one practising asceticism."
The King exclaimed:

"Who else could have done this service
which this great man has done unto me today?"
and, looking at him who stood in his presence,
bestowed on him full measure of great grace.

487-21

* * *

Explaining the event which had eventuated,
to the government executives
and to those who loved him
and were now desolated by grief,
the King said:

"Cherish the love of the sacred ash
which has been enjoined on you
by the injunctions of the Aagamas
and be redeemed."

Saying which,
he entered into contemplation
of the flowery feet
which dance in the Golden Hall.

488-22

* * *

The Life-mate of the Devi of the Himalayás
stood before His servitor
and graciously bestowed on him
a beatific vision
resembling exactly the same form and pose
in which he had formerly seen Him
in his contemplation,
and gave him the privilege—
out of reach of all the heaven-dwellers—
of arriving at the haven of His gracious feet
and
of uninterruptedly worshipping them.

489-23

* * *

Perhaps in the whole history of mankind, there is no parallel to the quality of forgiveness, which Meipporul-nayanar displayed on his deathbed. If a parallel has to be found, it can be found only within the pages of the Periya-puranam. Only Enathinayanar successfully contends the place of honour with Meipporul-nayanar,

(ii)

Servitor to the servitors of Enathinathan am I.

—Sundarar

The devotee, Enathinathan,
the City-Father of Einai,
an ancient in the world,

he who, on seeing the sacred ash
 on the forehead of him who was fighting with him,
 ceased to wield the unique sword in his hand,
 but did not throw it down,
 the eternal one who graciously stood still
 while his enemy hacked him to pieces—
 people of this world call him
 "The Light of Eezha Clan."

—Nambi-aandaar-nambi

Eyinanoor was a well fortified ancient city in Chola-naadu, ruled over by a munificent king descended from the dynasty of the famous king whose conquests extended upto the Himalayas on the slopes of which he had his emblem of the tiger indelibly engraved. In that city lived Enathinathar, a perfect man of the Eezha clan, a sect of people who followed the profession of toddy-tapping. He followed the profession of fencing master to the king and the nobility of the city.

All the wealth
 come by teaching swordsmanship,
 out of a sense of duty
 characterised by great love,
 day after day,
 he dedicated to the service
 of the servitors of the feet of the Lord
 who confers the privilege of being His servitors
 on even those who failed to see
 His feet or crown.

611-4

* * *

While he led his life in this wise, a person practising the same profession, Athisooran by name, who had a very high opinion of himself and thought that there was no one who surpassed him in skill in the profession, found his earnings decline day by day while that of Enathinathar grew more and more, and conceived a hatred unto Enathinathar.

Like the moon at day-dawn
 which grows dimmer and dimmer
 as the sun rises in the sky,
 and finally loses its lustre,
 day after day more destitute he became.
 Till one day, he persuaded his relatives
 and other townsfolk to join him,
 and daringly decided to fight it out.

615-8

Accompanied by his henchmen, one morning he arrived before the doors of the house of Enathinathar, and

Like a slit-eyed sly fox calling out
a tiger of cruel eyes lying in its lair,
he cried aloud his challenge.

Enathinathar heard the challenge and rushed out of his house to find out who challenged him to a fight. At the same time, his retinue of warriors and relatives also came rushing out into the street and stood round Enathinathar.

On the enemy who threw the challenge saying
to Enathinathar who resembled a male tiger,
"About this matter of possession
of the hereditary right
to conduct our fencing school,
let us arrange in battle array
our respective forces on this open ground
and fight it out,
and let him who has not fallen in battle
possess the right."

620-13

* * *

Enathinathar readily agreed, and soon the two sides fell on each other with sword and scimitar, and mace and quarter-staff, and a gory battle raged on the plain. Decisively defeated in battle, Athisooran left the plain leaving behind him mountains of corpses of his henchmen. Describing the falling of the foes to the sword of Enathinathar and the flight of those who did not fall to his sword, Sekkizhaar sings:

Those who forced themselves to the front
to fight with the Fencing-master Enathinathar
fell to the ground felled by his sharp sword;
those who did not encounter him,
they fled the field
even like the foibles like
desire, anger, covetousness, infatuation,
pride and envy flee when faced by
eternal Realisation of Reality.

634-27

* * *

The departed Athisooran,
with the sense of disgrace at his defeat in battle
at the hands of his opponent
becoming overpowering,

laid himself down on earth,
did not close his eyes in sleep,
ruminated one whole night on what had happened
till his mind was in a whirl,
and decided:

"I shall overcome him by base perfidy!"

637-30

* * *

Early in the morning,
after the long-drawn out night,
the evil fellow sent word thus to Enathinathar
of the garland of multi-petalled flowers:
"Come to a secluded place
to engage in a battle
to win the right to conduct the school of swordsmanship
in which we two alone will fight
without killing any more men of our city!"

638-31

* * *

On hearing this, Enathinathar,
thinking that it was but fair to do thus,
accepted the challenge, and said:
"Let the stalwart of the cruel sword
come to the site he has in mind
to fight a duel with rapiers!"

639-32

* * *

Carrying by himself the dazzling sword
and the wooden shield inlaid with gold,
he got out of his house in such a manner
that his relatives might not come to know of it,
and went and stood at the site
where the other man had asked him to come,
awaiting the arrival of him
without attachment to the Faith.

640-33

* * *

The evil fellow who challenged Enathinathar
with evil intent,
though he was one who had never in the past
worn the sacred ash in the true spirit,
yet, since he knew
that Enathinathar would never hurt
in any circumstances whatever
those who bore the mark of the sacred ash
on their forehead,
he smeared liberally on his forehead
the white ash externally,
while internally in his heart
he bore at the same time black perfidy,

and,
 bearing in his hand a beautiful shining sword
 and a wooden shield studded with gems,
 entered the site which he had mentioned
 to the brave man
 who fought only a fair righteous fight.

642-35

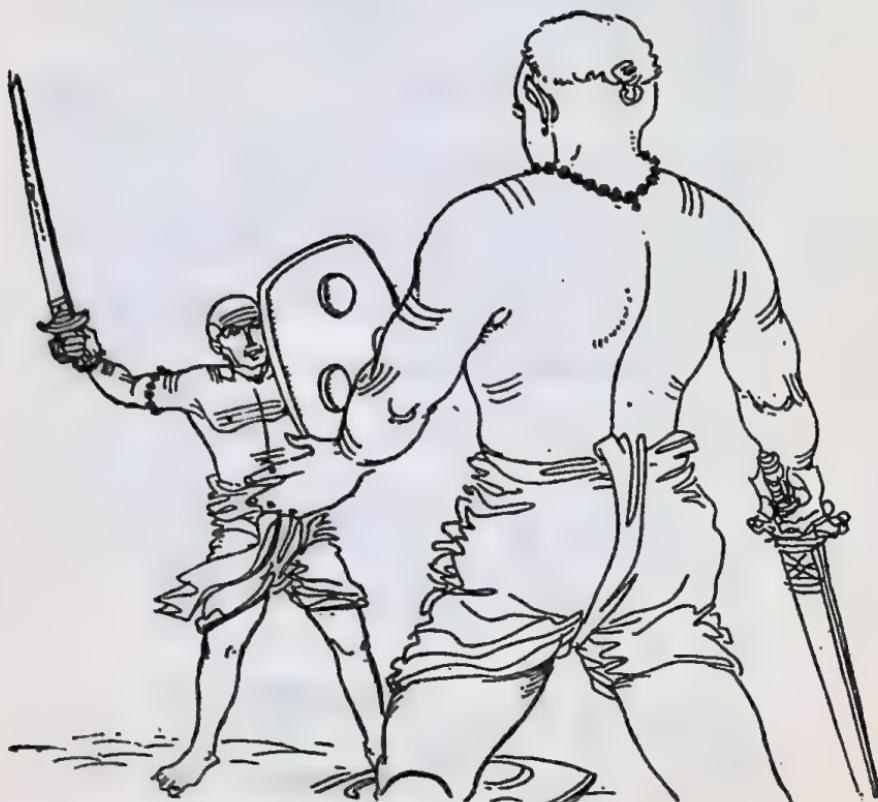
* * *

Seeing the stance of Enathinathar,
 like a never vanquished lion
 waiting for the appearance of its prey,
 he who had taken to unrighteous ways,
 hid his forehead with his strong shield
 till he could come quite close to him,
 and
 appeared before the matchless warrior.

643-36

* * *

Enathinathar,
 who had rushed on him like a charging bull,



and,
 finding a chance to kill him,
 had taken the suitable stand,
 saw
 when the side-stepping opponent
 shifted his shield to one side,
 the white ash on the forehead of the base fellow. 644-37

* * *

The instant he set eyes on it, he cried:
 "Ah! I am ruined !

I have witnessed on this man's person
 the lustre of the white sacred ash
 which I had never before seen on him.
 What other course is left to me?
 He has become a devotee of the Lord
 of the universe."

Keeping this in mind, he decided:
 "I shall conduct myself in turn
 with the aim of this person's plot." 645-38

* * *

He did not carry out his intention
 of divesting himself of the sword in his hand
 along with the shield,
 but, saying to himself:
 "The infamy of killing an unarmed man
 should not come upon this man",
 stood facing him
 still holding the strong shield
 and the oil-smeared sword in his hand,
 as if he was going to attack him. 646-39

* * *

Who knows the holy intention of this devotee
 who stood thus!

The wretch who faced him
 accomplished his intention.
 The Lord with the flashing matted russet locks,
 who alone knew the state of the mind of his devotee,
 manifested Himself in order to bestow grace on him. 647-40

* * *

What more shall we say
 in praise of the grace of the Lord
 of the heaven-dwellers?
 Graciously sundering the fetters of attachment
 to the world
 with the sword in the hand
 of the person without attachment to the Lord,
 the Partner of Her with golden bangles
 bestowed on him who had sought his succour
 the loving privilege
 of abiding with Him for ever
 without ever parting from Him.

648-41

* * *

Between the guise, perfidious as it was well known to be, and Lord Civan Himself, Enathinathar saw no difference. He worshipped the guise of a devotee of the Lord as the very Lord Himself.

iii

With Uraiyoor as their capital, the Chola Kings had long ruled in Tamilnadu. One of those kings was Pukazh-ch-cholar. Of him Sundarar sings:

Servitor am I to Pukazh-ch-cholar
 who gave up his life of groves-girt Uraiyoor!

* * *

And Nambi-andar nambi expanded the theme thus:

The world says
 the grandiose fame
 of offering his sword which laughs at his enemies
 to victory-drunk Eripaththar
 belongs to good-gifts-of-life-endowed Pukazhchcholar
 a direct descendent of Kokana-naathan,
 a descendent to the dynasty's traditional fame
 of laying to waste Singalanaadu
 of the neighbouring king.

* * *

Nambi-andar-nambi speaks of the grandiose fame attached to Pukazhchcholan on account of offering his word to Eripaththar. Pukazhchcholan had a very high sense of duty and responsibility as a king. All the guilt of wrong-doers in his country he felt as

his own and felt bound to atone for them. Nambi-andar-nambi refers to one such incident. Karoor was the site of this incident as it was to be the site of the incident which is the theme of this section. Civakaamiyar, a devotee of Lord Civan, was going about the streets of the city one early morning gathering flowers for the worship of Lord Civan. The Mahut of the royal elephant was also out in the street with the elephant, perhaps to take it to the neighbouring river for its morning bath. The elephant got out of control and rushed into a street where Civakkaamiyar was collecting flowers. On seeing the onrushing elephant, Civakamiyar tried to run ahead, but the elephant overtook him, seized the basket of flowers he was carrying and, throwing it on to the ground, trampled on it. As it rushed ahead, Civakaamiyar with faltering steps chased it and, tripping over some obstacle, fell down. The Mahut, unmindful of the mishap, was taking the elephant away. Eripaththar, a militant devotee of Lord Civan, who was a witness to the incident and the gross indifference of the Mahut to the accident to the devotee got enraged and ran forward and overtook the elephant and severed its trunk with his machet. The Mahut who came to the rescue of the elephant was felled to the ground with one stroke of the same machet.

Palace retainers rushed to the palace and reported the outrage to the king. The king was Pukazhchcholan. He came in a rage to the scene, but on hearing the circumstances of the incident, cooled down and offered his sword to Eripaththar and, bowing down before him, pleaded to be beheaded as he, ultimately, was responsible for any crime in his kingdom. This is kingship. Unparalleled sense of responsibility as a king!

On this occasion, there was an Eripaththar to refuse to take the sword, but on the next occasion, Pukazhchcholan had his way and atoned vicariously for the crime of an unknown soldier against an unknown and apparent devotee.

Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale. He sings:

While he was thus staying in Uraiyoor,
one day, he set out with his royal entourage
and arrived on an auspicious day at Karoor,
a principal city of special importance
to his dynasty,

that he might hold court
to enable his vassal kings to pay obesiance to him,
and to enable the Kongars
and the important petty kings of the western region
to pay their tributes.

3952-11

* * *

He inspected the tributes,
and, after graciously bestowing on the kings
who had brought the tributes
the right to continue to govern their kingdoms,
he turned to his ministers
of ripe political wisdom and long experience,
and said:

“Find out and tell me of fortified places, if any,
where dwell rebellious kings
who do not submit to the rule of our sceptre
which wields sole sway over all the land.”
And they replied in tactful words:
“Yes, there is one king
who has not brought the tribute levied by you,”

on hearing which, he smiled in amazement.

3957-16

* * *

On his asking, “Who is he?”,
they answered:
“Athikan is his name,
he lives close by inside a hill-fortress
girt by lofty ramparts.”
On their saying so, he exclaimed:
“Is there indeed a fortress hereabouts
which can hold out against you?”,
and commanded,
“Set out with your army
and reduce to dust and rubble
that remarkable fortress
and deprive him of his stronghold.”

3958-17

* * *

As if the ministers were merely waiting for such a command,
they immediately set out with a powerful army and, after a fierce
and bloody battle, carried out to the very letter the command of
their king. After thus suppressing the revolt, they returned to
Karoor.

And the army brought before the Chola King
 of the mighty spear and majestic crown
 set with scintillating gems,
 the massed pile of raven-black-haired heads
 which had been brought up to the gates
 of the eternal city of Karoor.

3973-32

* * *

The King, who is the life of the lives on earth,
 saw a small matted lock
 on the centre of the skull of one of the heads
 which were brought for his inspection
 out of all the heads
 whose count exceeded all count.

3974-33

* * *

The instant he saw this—
 his body all atremble
 his mind in a turmoil,
 his palms joined together in worship,
 overwrought by acute anguish,
 he went forward
 and saw clearly the matted locks
 on the head in the hand
 of the stalwart soldier who had brought it along.
 Thereupon, the munificent monarch,
 with his lotus-like lovely eyes
 streaming with tears,

3975-34

* * *

wailed:

“Apart from the much praised famous victory
 won by my chief minister
 who, taking along a strong army
 famed for its war-drums,
 destroyed the enemy,
 very fine indeed is the way I have ruled, to no purpose,
 as Defender of the Faith of the Sacred Ash
 in this land girt by the wave-tossed sea!”
 Wailing so, he gave way to despair.

3976-35

* * *

"This person here," he continued to wail,
 "with the sacred head bearing the matted lock,
 who has donned the garland of flowers
 which warriors setting out for war wear,
 and has discharged his duty to his king,
 is, no doubt, one who belongs to the Faith
 of the Great Lord with the matted locks
 which hold up the waters of the Ganges.
 Whereas I, who have seen
 this fame-invested person's head
 with matted locks
 borne aloft and brought along,
 what do I yet live for?
 To uphold righteous rule in this world?
 I would only serve to bear a stigma!"

3977-36

*

*

*

Having concluded thus,
 he made up his mind to make suitable atonement,
 and bade his law-abiding ministers thus:
 "That he may provide by his rule
 protection to this age-long world,
 and that he may tread the hereditary path
 of service to the Lord
 who dances in the Hall in Thillai,
 invest my son with my triumphant crown."

3978-37

*

*

*

He consoled the hesitating ministers
 who were distressed on hearing his words,
 and intent on himself carrying out
 the expiatory act,
 stood firm on the righteous path
 and, as a first step, had a fire raised
 before which he stood resplendent
 displaying a form smeared all over
 with the unreality-dispelling sacred ash.

3979-38

*

*

*

Bearing on his venerable head
 a gem-studded golden basin
 which contained the head
 with the tuft of matted locks
 which he had noticed,



he went round the fire clockwise,
chanting all the time the Mystic Five Letters
which spell the name of the Lord of the Universe,
and reverentially entered with delight
the pillar of raging fire.

3980-39

* * *

The King of the Chera Country had died and the succession
fell to Perumaakkothaiyaar, also called Kazharitrarivaar.
Unwilling, yet willing, he agreed to be crowned king.

On the appointed day,
at the approach of the auspicious hour,
with all the required appurtenances
most excellently in evidence,
the auspicious rites were performed,
and Kazharitrarivaar
who,
well versed in the code of righteous rule
under which all creatures would happily live,

would rule over the world,
was crowned with a single diadem
as king over the affairs of the twin worlds
of the secular and spiritual life of the people. 3763-16

* * *

After the coronation,
he went clock-wise round the temple of his Lord,
and,
after prostrating before the Lord's holy presence,
he mounted the caprisoned elephant
and,
with trustworthy privileged henchmen
bearing aloft the regal umbrella
and twirling the yak-tail whisk,
was going round the fortunate city
when he saw a washerman,
carrying on his strong shoulders
a bag of Fuller's Earth,
coming before him.

3764-17

* * *

On account of the white appearance of his body
because of the Fuller's earth dissolving in the rain
and dripping over him,
the King imagined that this was the guise
of a devotee of the Lord
on whose hand a deer is manifest,

and,
sliding down from the neck of the elephant
with a beautiful forehead plate,
he went quickly forward,
impelled by a desire born out of great love.
and worshipped him with joined palms.

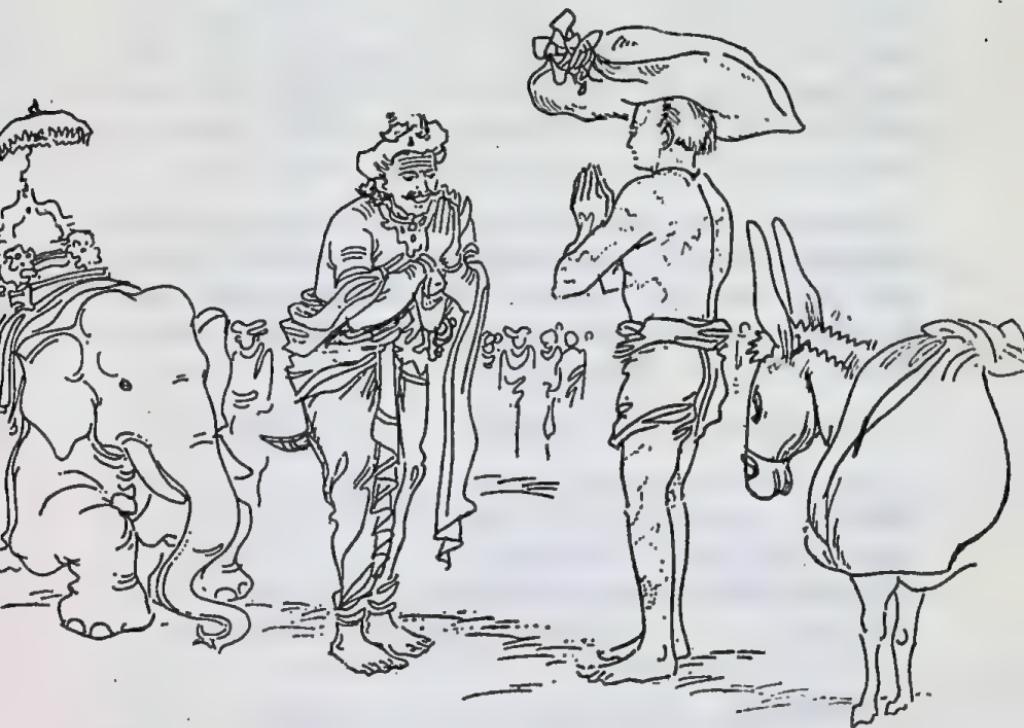
3765-18

* * *

Seeing the Chera King thus worshipping him,
and deeply perturbed thereby,
the washerman bowed before the king,
and said:

"Whom did you take me for?
This slave is a humble washerman."

To which the Chera King replied:
 "This slave is the humble Cheran!"
 and added,



"You reminded me of the guise
 of a person smeared with the sacred ash;
 please do not distress yourself;
 but go in peace."

3766-19

* * *

A perfidious man, but believed by everyone to be a devotee of Lord Civan, stabs a king on his back. The king stays the hand of the enraged bodyguard and bids him escort his assassin safely to the borders of his country.

A known rival, well known as one who never wears the sacred ash, now wears with wicked intent the sacred ash and challenges a devotee to a duel. At a critical moment, he discloses the sacred ash on his forehead. His opponent, the devotee, sees the never-before-seen ash on the forehead of his opponent, knows it for a ruse and still lowers his sword and allows himself to be killed.

A great king, in the hour of exultant victory sees on the head of one of the slain enemies a matted lock of hair. The owner of the head had fought against him and had been slain in a righteous battle. A man who takes up the sword must expect to fall by the sword. But the tuft of matted hair is an insignia of a devotee of Lord Civan. The king gives the benefit of doubt to the fallen warrior and fakes him to be a devotee of Lord Civan, and immolates himself in a fire for having caused the death of a devotee.

A mighty king on his first state ride round his city after this coronation sees a man with body covered all over with a film of some white substance, takes it to be the sacred ash and, sliding down from his elephant, stands before that man humbly worshipping him with joined palms.

In all the four cases it is the guise of a devotee of Lord Civan.

The guise of a devotee of Lord Civan is, perhaps, a cloak under which one may hide the most perfidious and lecherous heart. But how can one detect the false from the genuine? Therefore, the Civa-gnaanabodham bade all devotees of Lord Civan to respect the outer guise. For it is better to be cheated a hundred times than to lose faith in humanity.

Thirumoolar reiterated the same truth and declared:

"If you make an offering to the Lord abiding in the temple of several tiers, that will not be of any use to the devotees; but, on the other hand, if you give something to the devotees of the Lord, it becomes an offering to the Lord Himself abiding in the temple of several tiers."

(Thirumanthiram-1857)

*

*

*

And Sekkizhaar makes Thirugnaanasambandhar address the bones and ashes of Poompaavai:

"The fruits that persons gain out of being born as a human being on earth is feeding the devotees of the Lord who wears a moon in His crown

and
seeing with their eyes
the splendour of the good festivals of the Lord
and rejoicing:

if these are true,
come before the people of the world,"
thus said he. —Thirugnaanasambandhar. 1067

* * *

These words were spoken when Sambandhar, after ascertaining the will of Kapaleeswar, by which name Lord Civan is called in the temple at Mylapore, commanded, in the name of the Lord, Poompaavai, Civanesar's daughter who had been killed by the bite of a snake, and whose body had been duly cremated, and whose ashes had been preserved by the confident father awaiting the arrival of Sambandhar to bring her to life and make her step out of the pot.

There is quite a lot more in this act of hospitality to the devotees of the Lord than meets the eye. Particularly when it is accompanied by sweet words "suffused by love, and free from guile." Thiruvalluvar has said in his chapter on 'Virundombal', the hospitable calls this aspect of hospitality as 'Velvi', an oblation to God. And Thiruvalluvar uses the word 'Velvi' only twice in his book of 1330 couplets, and both times in the same chapter. The couplets in which this word occurs are worth reproducing here. They are:

There is no such thing as a measure
for the fruits of the pleasance called hospitality;
the worth of the guest is its measure.

87

* * *

Those who have not entertained guests
and gained the fruits of that pleasance
will lament, "We laboriously hoard our wealth,
but now we have no means of support."

88

* * *

Seven out of the 63 saints in Sekkizhaar's hagiography of the Saints of Tamilnadu gained Mukti by nothing other than feeding the devotees of Lord Civan.

There lived in Ilayaankudi, whose location it has not been possible to fix with certainty, a very rich landlord of the Soodra caste, called Maarran. Maarran is a title of the Paandiyan Kings, and we may therefore yield the place of honour to the claim of a village called Ilayaankudi, nearly two hours' distance on foot to the north east of Paramakkudi in Ramanathapuram District adjoining Madurai District.

Ilayankudi Maarranaar was as much rich in the produce of the plough as in a mind perfectly convinced of the greatness of love unto the devotees of the Lord with a chaplet filled to the brim with the waters of the Ganges. On the single consideration that they were devotees of the Sire who wore a string of bones as a garland, he used to go forward and receive with welling devotion, joined palms and welcoming words sweet to the ear whosoever came to him in the guise of a devotee of Lord Civan. After doing so, he would take the devotee to his house, wash his feet, place him on a seat and, after paying him due compliments, would feed him, to the complete fulfilment of the desire of the devotee of the Lord of the universe, with food of four categories (such as those which are gulped, those which are chewed, those which are drunk, and those which are licked by the tongue) and six tastes (such as sweet, sour, spicy, saltish, bitter and astringent).

In acting in this manner, Ilayankudi-Marranar was doing nothing more and nothing less than what was enjoined on him as a rich householder by Thiruvalluvar who said:

“All the wealth gained by the worthy by great toil
is for doing service (to the world).” (212)

* * *

“If it is said that ruin will result
from philanthropic munificence,
such ruin is worth buying even by selling oneself.” (220)

* * *

Ilayankudi Marranaar brought such a ruin on himself for two reasons. One was that Thiruvalluvar, perhaps, restricted to just ten couplets per chapter, failed to insert another couplet in this

chapter called 'Oppuravu Arrithal' or 'Realising Trusteeship of One's Wealth'. That couplet is found in Chapter 48 as No. 480 and is:

"One's riches will fast dwindle
if philanthropy is practised (see Ch. 22)
without considering the limits of what one has". (480)

* * *

Thiruvalluvar who was careful to insert the following couplet, namely,

"This world belongs to those
who are capable of bestowing the indulgent look
without detriment to their duties". (578)

in Chapter 58 'The Indulgent Look', failed to insert couplet No. 480 in Chapter No. 22.

Another reason was again, perhaps, a maxim of Thiruvalluvar which ends the Chapter on "Trusteeship of One's Wealth" (ch. 22). He says:

If it is said that ruin will result
from philanthropic munificence,
such ruin is worth buying
even by selling oneself. (220)

Ilayankudi Marranar lived to the letter and spirit of the above Kural that naturally he became poorer day by day till he did not know how and where he and his wife would get the next meal. Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale now.

In order to show the world
that Ilayankudi Marranar
was a man who was capable
of doing this kind of kind act
not only when he was rolling in wealth
but even when, as a hard reality,
the adversity of poverty had set in,
the Lord abiding in Thillai
willed that the prosperous and vast wealth
should slowly disappear day by day
and, on the other hand, the state of penury
should rapidly come in its place.

445-6

* * *

While thus his prosperity was shrinking
 our Lord, Maarran, the king of Ilayankudi,
 continued to remain without any shrinkage
 in his liberal mentality,
 even when what he had , had changed hands,
 and what he had mortgaged
 had been sold outright
 in order to pay his debts,
 continuing and, perform his sacred service
 at no whit less than the former scale,
 became more resolute in his principle.

446-7

* * *

While thus was his conduct of life, the Lord, whose feet and crown Vishnu and Brahma as boar and swan could not find, dispensed with His mount, the bull, and also His Consort, and came in the guise of a man of great Thavam that the world might perceive by the knowledge of the worth of hospitality to devotees of the Lord and also of the worth of Ilayankudi-Marranar.

One night in the rainy season,
 when having no resources for obtaining food,
 hungry and sleepless he had gone to bed after shutting
 his door,
 Ilayankudi-Marraanar received a guest
 by force of his established special characteristic.

448-9

* * *

Ilayankudi-Marranar dried the guest's wet body,
 gave him shelter
 and, driven by a desire to give him welcome food,
 looked at his wedded wife and said:
 "This great man of great Thavam
 is sorely hungry:
 what shall we do about it?"

499-10

* * *

He further asked her:
 "O dear wife!

Even we have already no food for ourselves,
 tell me the means by which
 we may provide fitting and fine food
 for this person dear to the Partner
 of the Sprig of the King of the Himalaya Mountain."

450-11

* * *

The lady replied:

"I cannot see any other way!
 There are no neighbours
 who would give us anything any more.
 The time too is very late;
 there is no other place where he can go.
 What recourse is left to us
 of evil Karma?"

451-12

* * *

"Without minding the trouble of going there,
 if you would gather together the soaked seed-paddy
 which you sowed during the day
 that our adversity might be relieved,
 and bring it to me,
 I could to the best of my ability cook the same;
 other than this resource
 I do not know anything,"
 said she despondently.

452-13

* * *

Before his wife could finish her say,
 he rejoiced greatly
 as if he had regained his wealth
 and, impelled by the love of the idea,
 he agreed, and proceeded towards his fields.

543-14

* * *

As the sky was heavily overcast
 and it was raining heavily,
 the night, which made it impossible
 to distinguish the footpath
 in between the neighbouring sides,
 made all the world around look
 as if the density of the pitch-black darkness
 was melting and spreading everywhere.

454-15

* * *

This darkness would have made any one else of the world
 quail. In such a darkness which looked like a black slush and
 prevented anyone dare set out to a field in the middle of the night,
 Ilayankudi-Marranar, driven by the love in his heart, covered his

head by a big basket in which he intended to bring in the gathered swollen seed corn, and entered the field where the water-dwelling



birds were asleep. He groped with his feet for the seedlings, and gathered as much as he could and returned home quickly. His wife, who stood waiting at the door, received the basket of seedlings, washed the slush and mud as best as she could and, as there was no firewood in the house, cooked the food with the palm leaves on the roof of the house, which her husband pulled down for her. Thus after she had managed to roast the wet paddy and had extracted the rice within, she cooked the rice somehow, and then pleadingly asked the husband what they could do for a curry!

Sekkizhaar, who is famous for springing on you some most solemn and highly spiritual thoughts in a mundane setting, describes thus what Ilayankudi-Marranar did in answer to the puzzled pleading of his wife.

“Ilayankudi-Marranar,
his mind filled with the loving concern
that the Sire, his guest, must be languishing
with the weariness of his journey and the tormenting
hunger,

went into his garden
 and, searching with his hands,
 found and plucked the greens
 which had not yet reached in height
 even the brink of the bed in which they were grown,
 and gave them to his wife.
 What he was doing looked
 as if he was plucking off the very roots
 of the ill-fame of his worldly attachments.

461-21

* * *

With those greens, his wife prepared several appetising curries. After having thus made the meal ready, they woke the wearied guest who had dozed off into a disturbed slumber and fed him heartily.

Lord Civan now revealed Himself and gave Mukti to Ilayankudi Marranar and his wife for this unparalleled act of hospitality in the direst circumstances.

Singing about him, Sundarar says:

“Servitor to the servitors of Ilayankudi-Maarran am I”.

and Nambi-andaar-nambi expanding these few words sang:

To men of great Thavam who went to him
 in days of his impoverishment,
 as sweet food, a man cooked the seeds gathered from his
 field—

seeds which he had sown only that morning
 and which had sprouted by night time—
 which he roasted in a fire of the thatchings of his house,
 before dehusking it,
 and served it along with splendid curries of greens
 which had grown in the waste-land
 of his backyard.

That man who did so was the Karpaka tree
 called Maarran whom Ilayankudi
 full of waters rich with Kayal fish
 possessed as its citizen.

(ii)

Another saint who made feeding of the devotees of the Lord his life mission was Chirappuli Nayunar. Of him, Sekkizhaar sings

just six stanzas. Sekkizhaar could sing the biography of one saint in no less than 1256 stanzas and of another in no more than six stanzas.

In the land watered by the River Cauvery,
there was a town of long-standing fame;
it was Aakkoor,
the Brahmanas of good qualities of which place
the Prince of Sanbai graciously complimented
by the sacred words of his song
as people of the characteristic of giving
without ever saying 'no'
to those of the world who, driven by their poverty,
went there abegging.

3054-1

* * *

Sambandhar sang:

"Aakkoor where lived people
who were loyal to the falsehood-free
true way of life."

The second stanza describes the beauties of nature of Aakkoor.

In the third stanza he compliments the Vellaalars, the landlords and peasants in these words:

"Aakkoor of hard working men,
called Vellaalars on account of their
superiority over others
due to their magnanimity and munificence
in giving to others".

* * *

In the fourth stanza, Sambandhar compliments the Brahmanas in these words:

"Those who stuck to their duty
of performing 'Velvi'
and of studying the great Vedas,
along with its six appendices".

* * *

In the fifth stanza, Sambandhar compliments the men who win their bread by hard toil, the landless daily labourer, perhaps, the Panchamas, in these words:

"Those who attacked the earth
and dug by the side of the ancient temple
tanks which abounded with blue-lilies".

The sixth stanza, is about the tall buildings in Aakkoor which to the eyes of the little child seemed to scrape against the moon in the sky.

In the seventh stanza however, Sambandhar reverts to his praise of the categories of people living in Aakkoor, and praises the Brahmana residents for the second time in the decad in these words:

Aakkoor indeed is the place where live
"People who sustained and maintained
the continuity of the study and practice of the Vedas,
with its six appendices, and many other arts as well".

The eighth stanza praises in general terms the devotees (without distinction of Varnas) who go daily to the temples of Lord Civan bearing in their hands flowers and water. This is the only decad in which several or most of the stanzas deal with the virtues of the people of various Varnas living at a place.

In the ninth stanza, he sings:

Aakkoor where live men of the nature
of never saying 'no', but always giving,
and rejoicing therefore,
to all who, on account of their poverty,
went abegging to them.

These words cannot but refer to Velalaars, which term means "people whose ideal of life is to render service". These were the landlords and the peasantry.

The tenth and eleventh stanzas do not contain any compliments to people of any Varna.

Sekkizhaar continues:

In every grove of pure flower-bearing trees,
and in every brightly shining mansion,
putting to shame the thunderous noise
of a downpour of rain,
the roar of the noise of chanted Vedas
rose and filled the air;

and putting to shame the clouds of smoke
arising from piles of Akil wood burnt in the streets
and at places adjoining the beautiful mansions,
the clouds of smoke from the Ahuthis
(the oblations of ghee, fragrant wood,
and sometimes, as a crowning act,
offerings of costly clothes,
flung in the sacrificial fire)
in every shed where Homams were being performed
filled the air.

In that Thiruvaakkooor
abounding with sugarcane juice boiling plants
which had as fencing rows of Kamuku trees,
lived a very much world-renowned person,
one belonging to the clan
to which the Vedas belong,
a man of noble character
who had undertaken as his life-mission
service unto the Dancer of eight shoulders
and a blue-hued throat.
Such person excelled in the virtue
of giving which had been raised by him
to a stage of perfection.

3656-3

* * *

Whenever devotees of the Ruler of the Universe,
the Beautiful-eyed one, came,
he used to prostrate at their feet
and, standing before them with welling ardour,
speak sweetly,
feed them day-after-day with good food,
give them whatever they desired for.
Thus immersed in exceeding joy,
he resembled a downpour of rain of riches.

3657-4

* * *

He repeated unceasingly the Letters Five,
tended the never extinguished fire,
performed all the good Velvis
that he might arrive (after death)
at the feet of the Lord
with the throat adorned by the stain of the poison,
performed his acts of munificence,
through force of unremitting love,
to the endless throng of devotees of the Lord,
and finally found rest
under the shadow of the feet of the Lord.

3658-5

* * *

The sixth and last stanza is not translated as it is in the usual pattern of Sekkizhaar concluding a chronicle and beginning another biography.

(iii)

A third Nayanaar who served the Lord by serving food to His devotees was a totally different type. Five are the stanzas which Sekkizhaar spares for this devotee, the first of which describes Thiruneedoor where this devotee lived. The fifth one, as usual with Sekkizhaar's chronicles, says farewell to the hero of that chronicle and hails the hero of the next chronicle. We are therefore concerned with only three stanzas into which Sekkizhaar has packed the extraordinary profession of this particular Naayanaar which financed his mission of feeding the devotees of Lord Civan. Sekkizhaar sings:

He was the Chief of the chiefmost family
among the Vellaalars
possessed of the quality of resplendent munificence.
He considered as his right
the privilege of performing the sacred service
which occupied his mind full of intense love
to the feet of the Lord with an eye on the forehead
and a throat with a stain in it;
he had the true reputation
of unfailingly giving gifts
to the devotees of the Lord
from largesses received for gaining victory in battle
over people who were not allies
of those who hired him.

4090-2

* * *

If people who had lost their country
in battle against their enemies
came to him and bargained with him
offering great riches,
he considered the proposition impartially
and, depending on his skill with the sword
to which even the Lord of Death
would give a wide berth,
he received the wages,
went and defeated the enemies,
gained laudable victory for his hirers
and, receiving the agreed upon gold,
he led his life with this money.

4091-3

* * *

All the riches he received in this way,
 he gave generously to the devotees of the Lord
 in the same measure and manner as they demanded,
 and served them pure food,
 sweets, ghee, curries, curd, milk, fruits,
 and thus continued to live
 performing service
 in a manner which did not swerve
 from the eternal code of love.

4092-4

* * *

Munai-aduvar was a mercenary soldier of fortune, not respected then or now, but still Lord Civan overlooked the ignobleness of the profession and gave him Mukti for feeding the devotees of Lord Civan. Of him, Sundarar sang:

"Servitor to Munaiaduvar, the noble man
 of the spear of felling nature am I"

which pithy sentence Nambi-andar-nambi expanded thus:

"Thus people say:
 The Chief of Needoor, Munai-aduvan,
 received wages from persons
 who had consistently lost in war,
 and fought and gained victory for them;
 and gave away all the great riches thus gained
 to the kinsmen of the Lord
 Who bent as a bow the hill
 called the good golden Meru."

"God's will hath no why". For the alleged act of apostasy, Lord Civan conferred the title of 'Naavukkarasar' on Marulneekkiyaar, and here one chieftain conferred on a thief of paddy from the public granary, a bufferstock against possible years of lean production, the privilege of taking as much paddy as he wanted on as many occasions he desired—a reverse kind of Shariat Law.

In Kodumpaaloor, the capital of Konaadu (said to have existed in the Puthukkottai District of Tamilnadu) there lived Itangazhiyar, a chieftain of that minor State. He was a descendent from the clan of the famous Aaditya Cholan. Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale.

He was the bearer of the name Itangazhiyar,
a name of great rising fame in the world.
Other than the way of life
of serving the feet of Him—Lord Civan
Who burnt the three cities of the unruly Raakshasas—
he was a person who never thought of,
even in his dreams, any crooked way of life.
On account of daily continuing great love,
he was doing whatever services
the servitors of Lord Civan desired for.

4112-4

* * *

He was a person whose form of Thavam
was the giving of food to the devotees of Sankaran.
One day, unable to find any way
of obtaining provision to feed a particular devotee,
and finding his chosen form of service
obstructed thereby,
yet filled with welling -up desire to serve food,
he did not realise the nature of the deed
he was doing.

4114-6

* * *

When he was in the act of taking paddy
one pitch-dark midnight
from one of the several ricks of paddy
in the well-guarded store-houses of the King,
the guards who went on their rounds
beating their drums,
caught him red-handed
and produced him before the king.

4115-7

* * *

On the king, who was holding court at that time,
seeing the man of genuine Thavam
and questioning him, the devotee replied:
“On my mission of feeding the devotees
of our Father in Heaven
being hindered, I acted in this manner!”
On hearing him say so,
the king was filled with compassion,
and freed him, saying:
“This man is truly my treasure-house!”

4116-8

* * *

With a heart which had lost
its balance, he added:

"Apart from the granaries of paddy,
from all other overflowing treasure-houses
loot all you need and take away
for the purpose of feeding the devotees of God."
Furthermore, the king, who would reap
the real benefits of the riches he had amassed,
announced this fiat everywhere
as a proclamation, by beat of drums.

4117-9

* * *

In such reverence was held the virtue of feeding the devotees of the Lord. Of Itangazhiyar, Sundarar sang:

"Servitor am I also to Itangazhiyar
of a garland of many-petaled flowers"

Nambi-andar-nambi expanded these words in the following verse:

Our Monseigneur is indeed Itangazhi,
a descendent of the line of Aadiththan
of Kongunaadu,
who roofed with gold sheeting
the Hall of Gnosis (in Thillai) of the Lord
who humbled Lord Vishnu
when he came in the form of a lion,
who proclaimed by beat of drum
that the kinsmen (devotees) of the Lord
with a moon atop His matted locks
are truly our wealth.

(iv)

Moorka Nayanar was another servitor of Lord Civan who made it a mission of his life to feed the devotees of the Lord. He lived in Thiruverrkaadu which is situated on the northern banks of the River Paali in Velanaadu, a part of great Thondainaadu which corresponds today to the North Arcot District of Tamilnadu. Sekkizhaar vividly describes that river in his chronicle of Thirukkurippu-th-thondar. He describes the river in spate during flash floods and the same river in other times, when it is either totally without water or has a sluggish slimy trickle sleepily snaking along the edge of one border or the other. He sings:

Paali is that which fills lotus-abounding tanks
 with pearls, sandal wood, Akil wood, and rubies
 brought down by the river-waters
 which is in reality
 the milk spurting from the teats
 of the udder of Surabhi—
 the unique cow Kaamadhenu,
 possessed by the famous great Thapasvi—
 on the top of the Nandi Hills
 and which turns into flood waters
 and flows down the sides of the hills.

1098-21

* *

This is Paali in floods. The other song is:

Like the mother whose swollen breast spouts milk
 on the infant softly caressing it
 with its tiny hands,
 on the peasants kneading the sandy bed in summer
 and scratching it with their hands,
 floods of water from both sides
 seep down the furrows,
 and rise up to the surface,
 and, overflowing into the low-lying rows of fields,
 break down the sluice gates.

* * *

This too is Paali.

1099-22

On the northern bank of this river was this Verrkaadu where Moorkka Naayanaar lived. Let Sekkizhaar tell us how this servitor of the Lord contrived to continue his mission of feeding the devotees even after he had lost all his wealth.

Sekkizhaar sings:

He occupied the chief place in the Velaanmai clan
 which had as its essential characteristic
 an attachment of undiminishing nature
 to the Hope of our lives,
 who is adorned by a thicket of matted russet locks,
 to Him who abides in Thiruverkaadu
 of ramparts studded with red gold
 to Him who gave away the Amrit—elixir of life—
 to the heaven-dwellers
 and ate the poison as food.

3619-2

* * *

From the day he was born in a flawless family
 and grew and gained knowledge of the world,
 he learnt that adherence to the use
 of the Primordial Being's sacred ash
 (and what it stands for)
 is genuine riches,
 and unswervingly practised
 the daily righteous routine of cooking food
 for the loving devotees of Haran,
 and of himself taking food
 only after watching the devotees eat
 the food he had cooked for them.

3620-3

* * *

Pure cooked rice, ghee, sweets,
 tasty fine curries, these he arranged for;
 and, after ceremoniously saying obeisance
 to the devotees who came to his doors,
 he fed them with great delight,
 helped them by giving them
 other things exactly as they wished for,
 and felt very happy by doing daily such services
 imbued with love.

3621-4

* * *

While he was thus spending his days
 in practising this virtue,
 the guests came in such larger and larger numbers
 that all the liquid assets he had
 were completely liquidated
 and, therefore, he sold his bonded slaves,
 the acres of land he possessed,
 and all other immovable assets,
 and continued to provide food to the devotees
 and became a man of insatiable heart
 in doing such a service.

3622-5

* * *

When finally he did not find
 anywhere in that place any resources
 wherewith he could provide food to the devotees,
 he became distressed and despondent;
 and
 he left that place

when he could not find anyone
 to play a game of gambling—
 good skill in which he had learnt in the past
 and which had still survived with him—
 by which he could earn wealth.

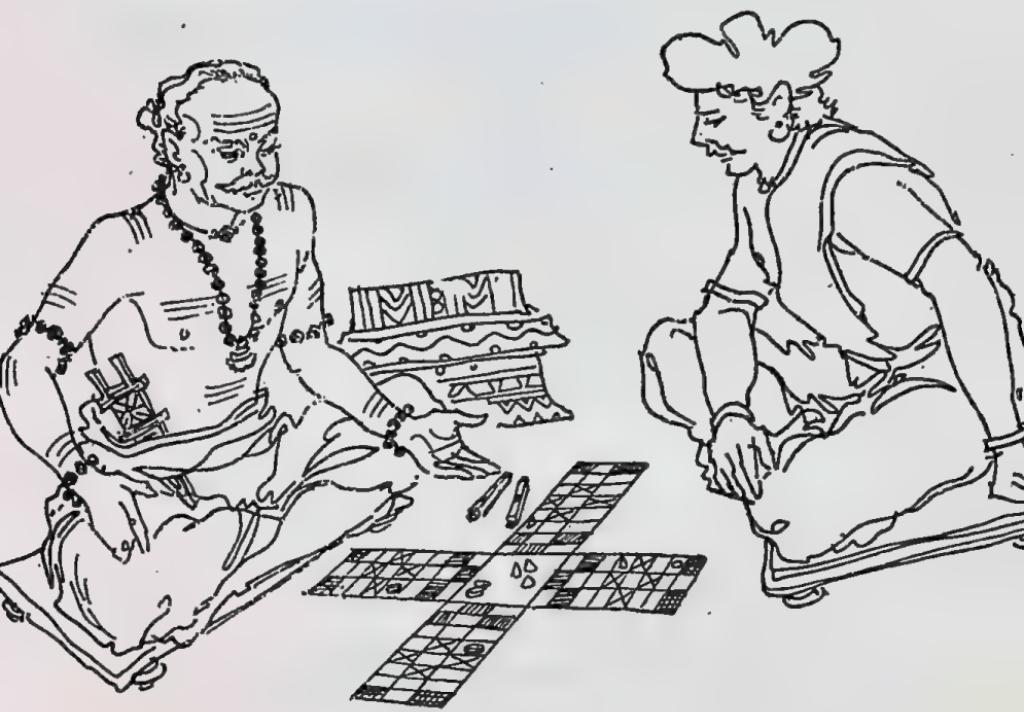
3623-6

* * *

Driven by his love of the Lord,
 he visited many shrines—
 where abides the Lord who rides a bull
 and goes round seeking alms—
 and paid his obeisance to Him
 with melting heart.

At the same time, he gained his objective
 with the aid of the skill in gambling
 which he had learnt in the past,
 and arrived after a few days
 at Thiru-k-kudanthai (Kumbakonam)
 of the Lord with the bow
 which destroyed those
 who did not pay respect to Him.

3624-7



In order to gain the financial resources
for the purpose of providing food
to the servitors of the Lord of the dense darkish throat,
he played the gambling game of dice-rolling
in a common place in Kudanthai,
and, considering the wealth gained thereby
as verily the grace of Lord Civan, our Hope,
he fed the devotees therewith
and rejoiced.

3625-8

He lost in the first throw,
and the opponents won the money he bet;
but in later throws,
again and again he won
and made a great lot of money.
Those who refused to honour their oral bet,
he drew his dagger and stabbed;
thus this good gambler
got the name of Moorkkar—
the Rowdy Fellow—
in this great world.

3626-9

Losing on the first one or more throws of the dice is a gambit
used by all expert gamblers and con-men to lull the suspicion
and excite the greed of the opponents.

The wealth won by gambling
was rid of its evil quality
on account of the immaculate good intention;
he gave all that money
to those who prepared the food
and never touched any part of it.
After the devotees had feasted
on the food with pleasure,
he joined the last batch of guests
and, without any blame attaching to him,
ate his meal.
While he spent his days thus,

3627-10

when, all his bad Karma
had been got rid of by the grace of the Lord
through serving food with ardour
to the devotees of Lord Civan, the Naathan,
he departed from this world,
and entered the City of Lord Civan
who dances to the songs of His host of ghouls.

3628-11

Sundarar sang these words about Moorkar:

"Servitor to Moorkkar too am I",

Nambi-andar-nambi expanded the two Tamil words—"Moorkkarukkum atiyen" into a beautiful song of four lines and more than two dozen words. He sang:

The Prince of Verrkaadu
surrounded by cool groves,
winner of the bets made by expert gamblers
by his skill in the gambling game of the dice,
and giver of the wealth so won
to Lord Civan's devotees
with bodies smeared all over by the sacred ash—
people in Kudanthai, blessed with waters
in which crabs abound,
call that skilled gambler Moorkkar.

(v)

Narasinga-munai-araiyar is well remembered by all students of Periyapuram as the foster-father of Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal who, as usual with him, dismisses this servitor too in a brief line. He sings:

"Servitor am I
to the true servitor Narasinga-munai-araiyar."

But Nambi-andar-nambi paints in pithy, picturesque words the service of this true servitor.

He sings:

Does it lie in my power to praise his uniqueness?
who was bestowing fine gold on ascetics,
seeing among them an asset,
with frame covered by despicable sores,
the result of embracing promiscuous women,
bestowed on him that day
a double gift of gold.
Such is the uniqueness of Narasinga-munaiarayar
of world-renowned crown.

*

*

*

Sekkizhaar embellishes the picture thus:

On every day in the year,
when the Aathirai asterism is in the ascendent,

he always performed special elaborate worship
and, to all the sacred-ash wearing servitors
who assembled thereat on that day,
he gave no less than one hundred pure gold coins,
and treated them to a sumptuous feast.

* * *

When he, who was following this routine,
was bestowing on one such occasion shining gold coins
on servitors of noble conduct,
there arrived a sacred-ash-wearing person
of a body scarred with clusters
of syphilitic sores come by conduct
conducive to destruction of one's honour.

* * *

Noticing bystanders moving away
with contempt and disgust
on noticing the condition of that person's body,
the Chieftain went forward with joined palms,
received that kind of person
and made much of him.

* * *

Concerned that the people of the world
should not go to hell
for treating with contempt persons who,
notwithstanding being men without nobility of conduct,
had sought the sanctuary of the sacred ash,
he gave him double the number of gold coins
given to any person who came to him,
and, furthermore, paid obeisance to him,
and bade him good-bye
to the accompaniment of sweet words. 3986 to 3989-4 to 7

* * *

(vi)

Nesar, a weaver by profession, and a servitor of Lord Civan,
was a person who held the view that clothing the least important
of the devotees of Lord Civan was clothing Lord Civan Himself,
the Digambaran, who wore the cardinal points of the compass
themselves as His clothing.

Sekkizhaar devotees just six stanzas to this servitor, who lived
in Kaambili, a town in a taluk of the same name in Bellary District

of Andhra Pradesh. Kaambili is the farthest place to the north of Madras City where lived a servitor of Lord Civan and whose biography has been included in the Periyapuram. Kalaththi, again now a shrine in Andhra Pradesh, the shrine at which Kannappar the Hunter worshipped Lord Civan, is by comparison a place not very far from Madras, only 23 kilometres to the north-east of Renigunta Junction which is only 137 kilometres from Madras Central Railway Station. This biography of Nesar shows that Bellary was a part of Tamilnadu in the days of Sekkizhaar.

Nesar was a leading light in his profession, even as he was a luminary in the practice of the ideal of making the duty of serving the devotees of the Lord who wears a serpent as an ornament, and of adorning his head with their feet his chief occupation. Sekkizhaar describes this virtue in an outburst of supreme poetry. He sings:

There at Kaambili,
he dedicated to the feet of Haran
the activities of his mind;
to the Supreme Five letters
he dedicated the activities of his mouth;
the activities of the profession
which sustained him,
he dedicated to the servitors of our Lord;
he wove workmanship-exhibiting dhoti
and faultless Kovanam—
a strip of cloth which went beneath the loins. 4194-3

* * *

In addition to the dhoti,
loin cloth he wove;
and, acting up to his principle
of giving dhoti and loin cloth
to the devotees of the Lord riding on the bull,
he unceasingly did this act of service to them,
and every day worshipped their feet.
Gaining merit by this act of service,
he reached the haven of the feet of Haran. 4195-4

* * *

(vii)

Paaree, a rich chieftain noted for his munificence, desirous of detaining the departing Auvaiyar some more days with him,

disguised himself as a purse-snatcher and robbed Auvaiyar of her purse so that she might return to his court to lodge a complaint.

Palayanoor's Kaaree, another man noted for his munificence, on whose quest Auvaiyar was on one occasion, placed a hoe in her hands to enable her to accompany the other members of his family who, each armed with a hoe, were setting out to weed his fields. He thus honoured her as a member of his family. Cheramaan, King of the Chera Kingdom, instead of observing the protocol laid down for greeting a famed poetess, greeted her familiarly, thus showing how much he loved her.

Paaree, Kaaree, Cheramaan, all these were kings or chieftains, and they knew only too well Auvaiyar's fame and caustic tongue. But Auvaiyar had one day another type of experience. Caught in a sudden downpour of rain, and drenched to her very skin, old Auvaiyar saw before her a lowly hut of some lowly people. The girls of the house knew nothing about her. But, moved by innate compassion, they invited her into their hut and gave her one of their own petticoats, a blue one, to wear while her wet clothes were being dried.

The girls who lent her a blue petticoat did not stop with that, but served her hot and delicious food, the best their means would permit. Auvaiyar praised the food in the following song:

Hot and fragrant,
and more than enough to eat,
with ghee liberally laced,
the colour still green—
they falsely called it a dish of greens,
but served Amrit verily;
the hand that served such a dish
deserves a bracelet of gold.

* * *

We learn from these chronicles the importance of cultivating the virtue of hospitality to which subject Thiruvalluvar devotees a separate chapter (No. 9) under the heading "Virundu ombal".—"Cherishing the virtue of serving the stranger who comes to your door." Thiruvalluvar laid down the code of conduct and Sekkizhaar provided no less than six outstanding examples of lives of people who lived up to the Valluvar code of conduct.

9. ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTS

(Clause 3b of 12th Soothram of Civagnaanabodham)

Worship the Temple as Haran Himself

The "holy forest where elephants roamed," Thiruaanaikkaa, five kilometres from Thiruchirappalli, is a very ancient shrine of Lord Civan.

In those days of yore there was a Jambol tree in the riverine swamps of the Cauvery. In Tamil, the tree is called Naavalmaram. There are no more pragmatic people than the Tamils. They declare the fruits of the season as the most acceptable offering to God in that season. The Naavalmaram, just like the wood-apple tree, is in fruit in August. Therefore the fruit of both the trees were made very acceptable offerings to Lord Ganesh on His special festive day of Ganesh-chaturthy.

Our Jambol tree was not an ordinary one. It was a special and rare variety, a Ven-naaval-maram, a white Jambol tree. Under that tree there was a stone — a stone with a shape, and, yet without a shape, an amorphous stone. In that low-lying swamp, with water seeping around it all the year round, lay the stone, the amorphous stone. A soul-endowed spider lived in the undergrowth surrounding the stone under the Naaval-maram. True, the stone lay under the shade of the tree. But the tropical sun still managed to strike its rays on the stone through the latticed foliage of the tree.

The lowly spider saw in the amorphous stone the lingam, which is "the final sign of Him whom every form is powerless to portray, much less to contain."

There was at the same time an elephant in the forest who too was attracted to the stone and who too saw in the stone the nameless and formless Paramacivam, the Godhead.

Let Sekkizhaar take up the chronicle.

In the Chola domain—
 the heritage from the Chola
 who gave to a falcon his own flesh
 weight for weight of a dove
 (and saved its life)—
 on the banks of the River Ponnai
 whose wave-tossed waters throw up on the shore
 Akil, sandal wood, pearls and gems,
 near the Chandra-theertha-ghat,
 there was a large cool forest
 abounding in trees
 which propagated the elves.

4197-1

* * *

In that blooming forest,
 there was a white Jambol tree.
 On the Lord of anklet-girt feet—
 veritable blossoms indeed they were—
 whom Hari searched for in days of yore,
 merging in the shape of a lingam, beneath the tree,
 an elephant of great merit,
 albino in colour,
 began to worship the Lord,
 with a neck of the colour of the blue lotus,
 daily bathing it with water
 brought in its trunk from the river,
 and adorning Him with fragrant bunches of flowers.

4198-2

* * *

By this deed, the place gained the name
 of Thiruvaanaikkaa.
 That the heat of the sun
 and the debris of dry leaves
 might not fall on the red-golden sacred head
 of the Lord,
 a gnosis-endowed spider
 closely wove over Him
 with the thread—the product of its mouth—
 a wide canopy.

4179-3

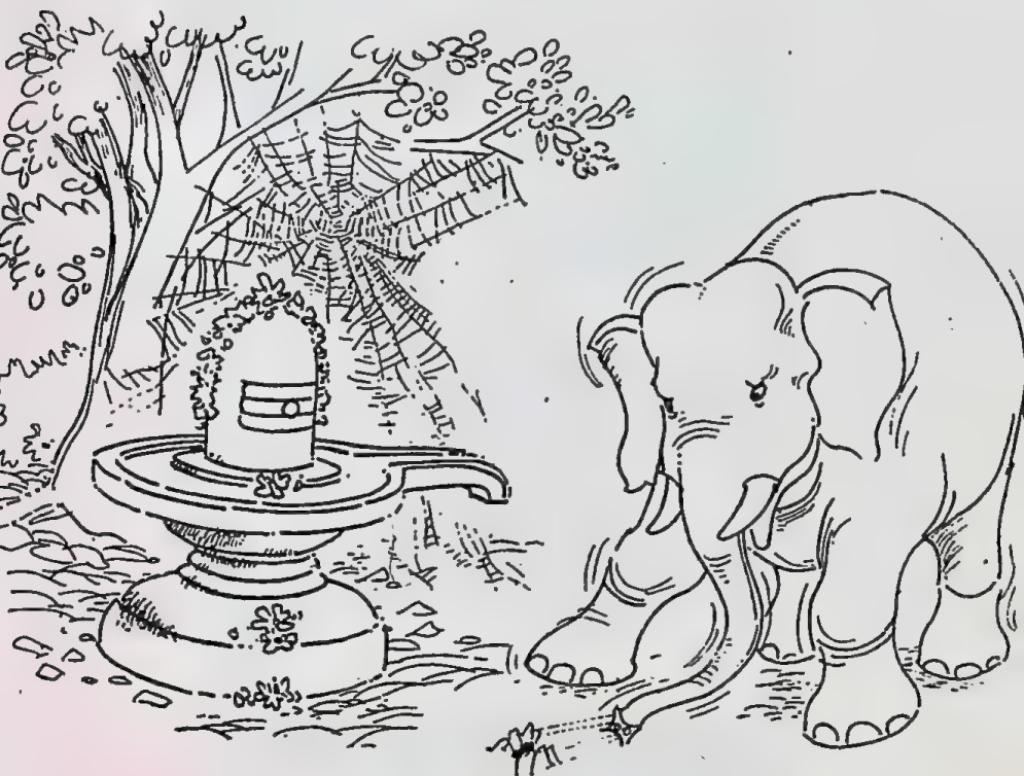
* * *

The elephant who went to worship the Lord
 the next day,
 considered unbecoming the canopy
 of spider-web expertly woven,
 and destroyed it.

The solicitous spider
charitably construed the contumelious act
as an accident of the chance brushing
of the huge trunk against the flimsy fibre,
and wove the web again.
Once again, on the day after,
the Gargantuan Gajapathy the gossamer destroyed. 4200-4

* * *

'What!
Destroy the web I spare no effort to spin
so that the dead leaves may not desecrate
the body of my Lord!"
Thus hurt in heart and aroused to anger great,
the octoped araneid entered
the trunk of the elephant
and bit it.



Mad with pain,
the enraged elephant of dome-shaped head
struck its trunk again and again
against the ground
and fell dead.

4201-5

* * *

On the trunk being struck on the ground,
the spider which had entered it,
too gave up its life.

Lord Civan, the Content of the Vedas,
according to His wont of bestowing grace,
conferred a boon on the maddened elephant,
and, in due course, He made the spider be born
in this world in the clan of the Cholas,
and graciously ordained
that it rule and protect the world.

4202-6

* * *

While Subhadevan,
a king in the line of the ancient Cholas,
along with his principal queen Kamalavathi
was regularly worshipping
the blossomy Feet dancing in the sacred Hall
in Thillai of eternal glory,
with his head touching the bottom
of the holy steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum.

4203-7

* * *

On the great lady, craving a boon
on account of her being childless,
the spider, who had rendered a great sacred service,
incarnated as a son
in the womb of that Kamalavathi,
the favourite of the Chola King,
on account of the Lord
of the russet red long matted locks
graciously willing so.

4204-8

* * *

When the days of pregnancy of Kamaladevi
of bamboo-like smooth shoulders
had advanced to the limit,

and the time for delivery
of the longed-for son approached,
the hoary Pundits,
who know the auspicious moment, said:
“If this infant would but be born
a Naazhikai of twenty and four minutes later,
it will be the Protector of all the worlds.

4205-9

* * *

On the royal lady saying:
“Bind up my legs
and hold me upside down
that my child may not be born now,
but a Naazhikai later,”
suitable action was taken.
When the time forecast by the astrologer came,
the bonds were removed and she was laid down,
and she, whose fame will never die out,
gave birth to the child,
and exclaimed,
“Ah, my Prince!
Is his eyes blood-shot?”
and breathed her last.

4206-10

* * *

The King blessed with a son and bereaved of a queen at one
and the same time, brought up the child and, after crowning him
king, joined his ancestors. The child ruled under the name of
Chenkatchola—The Cholan with the bloodshot eyes! Of him
Sundarar and Nambi-Andaar-nambi sang thus:

“Servitor am I to Chengkannar
who ruled the world as the Southerner”.—Sundarar.

* * *

It is Chembian
called saintly Kochengkannan,
the Cholan of the pious clan
which never paid homage to any faith
other than that of the Lord of the dark throat,
who formerly as a spider spun a canopy,
and, in consequence gained the form
of devotee of Civan,
and, coming into this world,
constructed countless temples
of tier upon tier.

(Nambi-aandaar-nambi)

Continuing his chronicle of the spider-turned king, Sekkizhaar sings:

Kocchchengkatcholan of gorgeous garland
and valorous spear,
who was born in this world
with a knowledge of his past life
by the grace of the Primeval Lord,
and was ruling the land,
undertook the task of serving the Lord
by lovingly erecting many great temples
for the Lord of the Hosts to abide with pleasure.

4208-12

* * *

Recollecting the grace he gained
formerly at Aanaikkaa,
he set about constructing a temple
which He with the sacred hand holding a deer
may delight in.

Including the white Jambol tree
of association with gnosis
within the structure,
he completed the work of the temple
in which the Lord with a neck
of the colour of the blue lotus
might abide so that welfare might abound in the world.

4209-13

* * *

The pre-eminent Chenkannaar,
the matchless ancestor of Anapaayan
the munificent giver,
sent his ministers to all the vast districts
of Chola Kingdom of undying glory
and got many shrines built
for the Lord with the beautiful crescent moon
to abide.

4210-14

* * *

"Worship the temple of Haran as Haran Himself" enjoins the *Civa-gnaana-bodham*. Before the temples could be worshipped, temples should be erected. It is for this reason that prince and plebian vie with each other to build temples to the glory of God.

Kaarinaayanaar was not a rich man. Sundarar makes him 'an also ran' in a line devoted to another saint. He sings:

Servitor
to Kanampullar who held on to the anklet-girt feet
of Him with a stained throat
as his only haven of refuge,
and
to Kaari as well am I."

* * *

People say of Kaari
hailing from Kadavoor,
girt by wall of granite stone,
that he polished the metre and matter
of his poetical compositions
till they were beyond being brushed aside
as piffles by the world,
and entered Kailasa
by praising with them Lord Civan
the Wielder of the unique bow
which was none other than
the golden Meru Mountain.

—Nambi-aandaar-nambi

Sekkizhaar sings:

Born in Thirukkadavoor,
a town largely populated by Brahmana,
he became expert in the various branches
of the prolific Tamil language,
and by the use of skilful words
he hid the estoeric meaning of his compositions,
and produced such faultless Kovais
in the traditional pattern
that his name flourished in the world.
These he dedicated to the three kings.

4064-1

* * *

With the wealth received from the kings
wearing fragrance-wafting garlands
through his poems
polished till they became pleasing to the princes,
he erected many shrines
where Sankaran
of the crown on which reposes the crescent moon
in company with the cruel snake of cruel eyes
could abide.

4065-2

* * *

To everyone he spoke sweet words
 pleasing to the mind,
 and gave liberally of the great wealth
 received by him
 to all the noble devotees
 of the Lord senior to all the Devas.
 He spent his days thus,
 his mind never forgetting
 the forest-abounding holy Kailai
 of the Lord astride the bull.

4066-3

* * *

He established his fame
 everywhere in the vast world girt by the seas,
 and
 filled with unremitting love
 steeped in tested experience,
 He arrived at the Kailas in the north
 steeped in tested experience,
 with his mind and body as well
 as a result of gaining the grace
 of the Lord with the matted locks
 drenched by the Ganges which ornaments it. 4067-4

* * *

Kaariyaar played it safe. The kings believed that he was eulogising them, and Kaariyaar presumably believed that Lord Civan too was under the delusion that he was praising Him.

III

But when a person erects a temple to God in his own person it is altogether another thing. Sri Kumaraguru-parar sang, "The place where 'I and mine' have ceased to exist is where God steps in with His feet." Manikkavachakar sang, "Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs from my heart for even as long as it takes to wink." It was again he who sang, "O Lord, You took my body as Your place of abode; for this I have no recompense to give!" Thirumoolar said that the human body is a walking temple of God. And the Lalita-Sahasranaamaavali tells us that the Divine Mother dwells in our skin, in our flesh, in our fat, in our blood, in our bones, in the marrow of our bones, and in the semen, and, by implication, in the egg from the ovary. Moreover, actually, the

ground plan of a temple is based on the ground plan of the human body with the six centres or chakras of Moolaadhaara etc.

It is no wonder, therefore, that some Nayanmars decided to build their temples in their own bodies. Of one of them, Sundarar sings:

Servitor am I to Poosal of Vedas-chanting tongue
and of eternal glory who hails from Nindravoor.

* * *

They say of Poosal of Nindravoor,
where blows the southern breeze
across the sandy wasteland,
that he spent many sleepless nights and days
deeply agitated in mind and wondering
when would come the time when he would speedily raise
a temple for the Lord with feet
which resemble a beautiful lotus flower.

* * *

Thus sang Nambi-aandaar-nambi, as usual giving body to the bare bones of Sundarar's all too brief words.

Let us listen to Sekkizhaar recounting to us the extraordinary feat of raising a temple without brick and mortar, without wood or metal. Sekkizhaar sings:

We relate a project carried out by the mind
of Poosalaar of Nindravoor
who planned to raise a temple
for Hirn who burnt the cities of His enemies,
but finding no help for that purpose
decided the method of raising it
by concept of the heart
as quite a good one,
and, accordingly, fabricated a good temple
with his mind.

* * *

Thirunindravoor is an ancient town in Thondainaadu
which is famous in this world as a country
in which righteous conduct
flourishes to a high degree.

It is a town
 in which the highly meritorious Vedas
 is very much in evidence
 it is a town where
 perpetually prevails
 the wealth called the ideals of Brahmanas
 who never falter in the righteous conduct
 most important for their caste.

* * *

Born in that town,
 that the tradition of unique Vedic clan might prosper,
 he grew,
 while at the same time grew apace in him
 a love which never swerved from the Path
 which led all the feelings
 which arose in his mind
 to converge at the feet of the Lord,
 and excelled in the clarity of knowledge
 of the Vedic code of conduct
 which would gain for him the Reality.

* * *

Convinced that what befitted him
 was to serve the devotees of Civan,
 he secured gifts by every means
 and donated them to the devotees
 to their hearts' content.
 Moreover, he conceived in his mind
 a plan to raise a temple
 for the Lord with a chaplet on His head
 containing the deep pool formed by the River Ganga
 to reside with pleasure;
 but he did not think
 of the lack of the large sum of money
 required for it.

* * *

He thought of all likely sources
 and sought laboriously everywhere
 for the necessary large funds,
 but did not receive anywhere
 even the least money.

Thereupon, he resolved to raise the temple
with his imagination,
and mentally collected grain by tiny grain
all the funds needed to achieve his purpose.

* * *

Along with the required materials,
with his mind, he sought out the architect too,
and, fixing an auspicious day
to construct a temple for his Lord,
he eagerly laid the foundation,
as laid down in the Aaagamaas,
and began to construct the temple with devotion
even in the small hours of the night.

* * *

Mentally he constructed
and made the several tiers—
right from the basement
to the base of the dome—
take perfect shape;
the crowning dome too
according to the prescribed cubit-height
he erected.
Thus many a long day passed
while he finished the temple
by the exercise of his imagination.

* * *

The flag-post he re-erected;
and with lime-plaster
he created architectural embellishments;
wells he sunk,
ramparts all round he raised,
tanks he dug,
and all other necessary structures
he constructed besides these.
Just when the appointed day suitable
for the invocation of Lord Civan
into the Lingam was approaching,

* * *

Kaadavar Komaan—the King of the Kaadavars,
had erected in Kaanchi a temple built of stone,
and had endowed great riches all over his realm
for the service of Lord Civan

On the day before the date
of the installation of the Lord
whom Vishnu could not find out
in spite of searching for Him,
the Lord who wears a garland
of just blossoming Kondrai flowers
came in dead of night
in that king's dream, and said:

* * *

"Nindravoor's Poosalaan, My devotee,
into the temple of far-reaching benefit
constructed with his mind
during many a long day,
tomorrow We are entering.
Therefore, skip tomorrow,
and fix for a later date
the function you have decided upon."
Saying so, the Lord with the long locks
decked with Kondrai flowers
went graciously to take abode in the temple
of the devotee.

* * *

On the immaculate One graciously saying thus,
the mighty king woke from his sleep,
and, impelled by a welling desire,
said to himself:
"I must see and worship the person
who has done such holy work"
and arrived at Nindravoor
surrounded by dense groves.

* * *

Arrived at that place,
he asked those who came to see him,
'Where is the temple erected
by the devotee Poosalaan?

They replied:

"There is no temple
constructed by the Poosal you mention."
The king thereupon commanded,
"Let all the Brahmanas of righteous conduct
assemble here."

* * *

On the Brahmanas all coming to see the king, he asked,

"Who among you is the flawless Poosalaar?"
When all the Brahmanas with one voice replied,
"That flawless Brahmana is of this place",
he would not allow them to send for him,
but he of the cruel lance
himself arrived at the place
where the devotee of the Lord was.

* * *

The King who called on the servant of the Lord, worshipped him and said,

"Which is the temple,
praised by people from all sides,
erected by you here?



By the grace of the Lord
 with an eye on the forehead,
 I learnt that today is the day
 of the installation of the Lord
 of the heavenly ones,
 and have come to see you
 and prostrate at your feet."

* * * *

The devotee, who heard the king say thus, looked at him with trepidation and said,

"If my Lord deemed/even me
 a thing of worth and graciously said thus,
 "Well, this is the kind of temple
 which I erected with my mind
 when there were no funds coming forward."
 Saying so, he explained in detail
 how he erected the temple with his thoughts.

* * * *

The king heard this,
 and, overcome by amazement, exclaimed,
 "How remarkable is the greatness of the devotee,
 of the flawless mind!"
 Thus he praised him,
 and fell prostrate on the ground
 with his garland of fragrant flowers
 hugging the earth,
 and, later, returned to his ancient city
 accompanied by his army
 which marched with measured steps
 to the war drums.

* * * *

When the appropriate auspicious hour came,
 the devotee installed Lord Haran
 in the temple erected by his mind;
 thereafter he lovingly performed
 with good effect for many a day
 all the necessary pooja,
 and at last entered the haven
 of the golden feet of the Lord
 who dances in the Hall made of gold.

* * * *

Obeisance to the golden feet of Poosalaar
 of unintermittent devotion
 who raised with his imagination
 a temple for the Lord
 with long russet locks.

4171 to 4188; 1-18

* * *

"Behold the God whom everyone is entitled to apprehend," sang Saint Manikkavachakar. The emphasis is on the word 'everyone'. If the Periya-puranam teaches us any lesson, it is this; everyone, from Pulayan to Bhoosurar, that is Devas on earth, that is, Brahmanas can lead the life led by the saints whose lives are chronicled in the Periya-puranam. Similarly they can build temples for God. We saw a prince and a plebian erect temples of brick and mortar for God. Erecting temples in the heart is also open to everyone. We saw a Bhoosuran, a Brahmana vie with a monarch in erecting a temple for God; the temple built by the monarch was of brick and mortar whereas the temple built by the Brahmana was a temple in the heart, a temple built of love and devotion. We saw that Lord Civan opted to dwell in the temple built in the cave of the heart, thereby showing us its superiority over the temple of brick and mortar. Even such a temple did a Sudra too erect.

Of him, Sundarar sings:

"I am servitor to servitors of Vaayilaar
 of ancient Mayilai,
 where the brilliance of the corals
 washed ashore by the sea
 dispels the darkness of the night."

* * *

And Nambi-aandaar-nambi, with his skill in saying much in few words, etches a poetic miniature thus:

"People say that Vaayilaan of famed Mayilai
 established the Lord of unceasing grace
 in the temple of his mind,
 lit a beautiful lamp therein
 with unabating ardour,
 offered at His feet the unfading flower—his heart,
 and
 served Him a veritable nectar called love."

* * *

Sekkizhaar divides his ten stanza chronicle equally between the glories of Mayilai and the biography of Vaayilaar. Perhaps, Sekkizhaar remembered Thiruvalluvar, and wished to pay his homage to him by praising the place which Thiruvalluvar honoured with his residence.

In the holy city of Mayilai of eternal glory
was born noble Vaayilaar,
rich in the fruits of Thavam,
that the most ancient family of the Sudra caste
may gain virtue-laden merit.

4084-6

* * *

With unforgetfulness as tool,
he chiselled a temple out of his mind
and set up the Lord therein,
lit the lamp
called experiencing the Primeval Lord intensely,
bathed Him with the waters
called tears of immortal bliss,
and served to the righteous One
the offering called love.

4086-8

* * *

The virtuous and loyal devotee
thus performed unremittingly for many a day,
day to day increasing love-charged worship of the Lord
by a liturgy of the heart,
and dwelt in the shadow of the feet of Lord Civan. 4087-9

Prince or plebian, Bhoosuran or Sudra, the Lord does not distinguish between them. It is their love which counts.

True it is that Lord Civan preferred to take abode in the temple built by Poosalaar in his heart, but this should not encourage us ordinary mortals to neglect the worship of the Lord in the temple of brick and mortar. The Periya-puranam teaches us by the lives of Thirugnaana-Sambandhar, Thirunaavukkarasar, and Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, the profit and pleasure of worshipping the Lord in temples with which Tamilnadu abounds.

10. DOCILE DEVOTEES

Aiyatikal Kaadavarkon of the Pallava Dynasty ruled in Kaanchipuram. But the glory of kingship soon turned to ashes in his mouth when he compared it with the life of a servitor of Lord Civan. Sekkizhaar relates the king's resolve and renunciation. He sings:

With kings serving him,
and the Language of the North
along with Tamil of the South
and various arts of kingship at his command,
he provided protection to the world.
While thus engaged,
he concluded that kingship was a misery,
and, despising that,
he unloaded it on his handsome son,
and began to perform with delight
spiritual service in the good-yielding field.

4048-3.

* * *

He, who was thus exercising the right
of rendering service,
visited all the temples in this sea-girt world
where the Lord of the heaven-dwellers graciously abode,
and worshipped Him.
In all these shrines
he performed every kind of service
befitting sacred servitude
and praised the Lord
in a series of songs in Venpaa metre
composed in versatile Tamil.

4049-4.

* * *

With great and surging love he worshipped
at the various shrines,
and arrived at cool Perum-patra-p-puliyoor
where he witnessed the beautiful dance
of the Dancer of russet matted locks
which He was graciously performing
in the Holy Hall of Gnosis,
and worshipped the Lord.

Our Servitor of Great Merit composed with ardour
at that shrine in perfect Tamil
tender blossoms of song in Venpaa metre. 4050-5.

* * *

This poem consists of twenty-four stanzas, all addressed to his heart. We learn from this poem that our servitor went to twenty-three shrines of Lord Civan, from Kuliththalai in Thiruchirapalli District to Thiruvotriyoor and Mylapore in Chennai District. He begins this poem with a stanza sung at Thillai, (Perum-patra-p-puliyoor). There he sang:

On the cessation
of the running of the sap of youth in the veins,
the relatives turn away from you;
age creeps in;
before the good axle (your body) snaps
and you arrive at the Presence
sought by you,
O my good heart,
go to Thillai-ch-chitrambalam.

1.

* * *

Sekkizhaar continues:

In this manner he gained the grace of the Lord
and, after staying a few days there at Thillai,
he went to all the temples of his Lord
in this world,
worshipped the Lord with perfect love,
performed suitable services thereat,
and sang sweet Tamil Venpaa
which all the world praises and adores.

4051-6

* * *

After he had performed in this manner
for many a long day
the service he was suited for
to the delight of the devotees of Haran,
he joined the company of the long line of devotees
eternally established under the holy feet
of the Transcendent Being.
Thus did Aiyatil the Kaadavar of Kaanchi
girt by ramparts of unassaulted virginity.

4052-7

* * *

Of this saint, Sundarar sang:

“Servitor to the servitors of Aiyatikal,
the Kaadavarkon am I”

and Nambi-andai-nambi expanded:

“ Our Pallavan, Aiyatikal is the sea of devotion
who, aspiring for Mukti, sang
one Venpaa each at all the shrines
of the Father of Kumaran of the strong arm
which bears a spear
and declared that
to become a slave to Haran
and receive alms from people
is thrice superior to being a crowned king.

* * *

This opinion is expressed by the servitor in the poem's 10th stanza which he sang at no particular shrine but as an expression of his belief.

“Worshipping the Temple as Haran Himself” does not stop with visiting the various shrines of the Lord and paying homage to Him. We saw that, recording the chronicle of Gananaathar, Sekkizhaar sang:

“Good flower-garden workers,
gatherers of clusters of fragrant flowers,
stringers of garlands of many flowers,
persons needed to fetch water
for the ritualistic bath of the Lord,
sweepers and scrubbers of the temple
day and night,
lighters of unlimited number of lamps,
copyists of the Thirumurai's
and readers thereof in the assemblage of devotees—
in such several sacred services
Gananaathar trained those who came to him”.

* * *

(ii)

All such services too are worship of the temple as Haran Himself. Appar who hoed away the weeds of the precincts of the temple was a Worshipper par excellence of the Temple as Haran Himself.

The worship of the Temple as Haran Himself took the form of lighting numberless lamps in the temples in the case of three

servitors in the Periya-puranam. They are Kanampullar, Naminandi-atikal, and Kaliyar.

Kanampullar hailed from Irukkuveloor on the southern bank of the river North Vellaaru which runs between Salem and South Arcot Districts on the one hand and Thanjavoor District on the other and forms the northern boundary of Cholanaadu. His caste is not known. It is said that he was the Chief of the chiefs of the several castes in that town.

He was a very rich man, but he considered as true riches the feet of Lord Civan only. Sekkizhaar relates:

Coming to the conclusion
that the foremost fruits
of blemishless great wealth is this,
he burnt lamps which shed unceasing light
in the temples of Lord Civan,
and sang His glory.
However, on poverty coming upon him,
he went to holy Thillai
of the God of gods.

4057-3.

* * *

In the days when our servitor abode in Thillai
worshipping with abiding love
the rosy feet which dance
on the gem-set Hall in Thillai,
the lights were being burnt,
with whatever was in his house
being exchanged for the lighting purpose
at Thiru-p-pulleecharam of Lord Civan,
the Bowman.

4058-4.

When that resource too was exhausted,
fearing to beg from others,
he brought to the market
kanam-pul, a kind of grass,
cut by his own bodily labour
and sold it for whatever it fetched,
and exchanging the sale proceeds for ghee,
our undeterred true servitor
continued to light the pure holy lamps.

4059-5.

While thus he was carrying out to perfection
 the lighting of the lamps,
 one day the grass cut by bodily labour
 and brought for sale
 not being sold anywhere,
 he would not abandon his service,
 but twisted the grass itself into a strand
 and burnt it like a beautiful lamp.

4060-6.

* * *

But as the slender grass
 was not sufficient to burn lamps
 in the presence of the Lord
 without reduction of the time
 the lamps should burn,
 he who would perform a true act of love
 burnt as the next lamp his own tuft of hair,
 making his very skull-bones melt,
 and
 burnt away his connection with the twin deeds.

4061-7.

* * *

(iii)

Naminandi-atikal hailed from a Brahmana family in Emappe-roor, now going under the name Thirumappatru or Neipperu. It is situated at a distance of two and a half hours walk to the south of Thiruvaaroor. He left his village for Thiruvaaroor, deeming that worship of the fragrant blossom-like feet of Lord Civan is every kind of reward for being born on earth.

Arriving at Aaroor,

He considered the privilege of worshipping in person
 the ruby-like radiant Effulgence
 in the red-golden ant-hill
 as the ideal spar to hold on to
 in the cruel sea of birth and death,
 and approached the ant-hill,
 bowed down before it,
 prostrated at its foot,
 praised the Lord,
 left the place,
 arrived at the courtyard
 with the beautiful golden ramparts,

1872-7

and entered the temple at a point called 'arranerri'.

He entered the Presence,
prayed,
and, moved by an ardour
arising from love of the Lord,
prostrated before the Lord and got up.
Inspired by a notion about the next step,
he exhaustively examined
the various possible acts of service,
and thought of lighting lamps in the temple,
and settled for that idea.
Forthwith he set out to do so.

1873-8.

* * *

When he set out,
as the day was past and twilight had set in,
he thought that time would be lost
if he went into the town;
and when, abandoning the idea,
he entered a nearby house
seeking ghee for the lamps,
it happened to be the house of Jains
who had forfeited Caivism.
They told him:

1874-9.

* * *

"To Him who has fire in His hand,
note that a lamp is a superfluity;
no ghee is here;
if you would light lamps,
take water and burn it in your lamps."
Thus to the holy servitor said they
of faulty faith whose creed is "IS; IS NOT".

1875-10.

* * *

Unable to bear the words of the Jains,
that very moment our servitor left the place
with grieving heart,
and, arriving at the temple of the Lord
with His crown adorned with fragrant Kondrai flowers,
the devotee with heart melting under the hot words
fell prostrate before the Lord.
Forthwith, a voice rose in the high sky

1876-11.

* * *

"Abandon your worry!
 In future, to do the service of lighting lamps
 unremittingly,
 fetch the water from this nearby tank
 and light your lamps."
 On hearing these words
 which rose by the grace of the Lord,
 Naminandi-atikal rejoiced in his heart,
 but stood knowing not what to do.

1877-12.

* * *

By the grace of the Lord
 Who bore on His head the waters of Ganga,
 he made up his mind and rose to act.
 Entering the waters of the tank,
 he chanted the name of the Lord,
 filled his vessel with the water,
 walked up the steps to the bank,
 arrived at the temple of the Father,
 and, to the astonishment of the sea-girt world,
 poured the water on the twisted wick
 in the akal, the oil-holder.

1778-13.

* * *

On noticing that when he lit a lamp
 it burned with a bright flame,
 he lit lamps all over the temple
 of the Primordial Lord abiding in Arranerri,
 the Holy of Holies in the temple in Aaroor.
 Thus, in the presence of those
 who thought evil thoughts,
 with mounting delight
 he burnt by the grace of the Lord
 lamps with water for oil
 while the whole world watched the miracle.

1879-14.

* * *

(iv)

Kaliya-nayanar was another servitor whose service in the temple of Lord Civan took the form of providing oil for lighting the lamps in the temples. He hailed from a family of oil-extractors of Thiruvotriyoor, famous from ancient times for its temple. Lord

Civan abiding in which went by the name of Thiyagesar (as is the case in Thiruvaaroor), a temple famous in the 9th century A.D. as the place where Sundarar went blind for breaking an oath, and famous in this and the last century as the shrine to which Ramlinga Swaamikal went almost every day of nearly twelve years of his life. Sekkizhaar records:

By the merit of Thavam performed by that caste,
he was born on earth in that caste;
he excelled others in rapidly gaining great wealth;
he stood foremost in fame
by the fitting name of Kaliyanaar;
he engaged himself as his prerogative
in the walk of life of sacred service
to the Lord with three eyes.

4027-6.

* * *

He was Lord of boundless wealth of many crores.
Realising the reason
why this kind of wealth came to him
and the purpose wherefor it came to him,
he arranged for rows of beautiful lamps
to burn night and day inside and outside
the temple of the Lord
with the young bull from the foothills
who abode in Thiruvotriyoor.

4028-7.

* * *

While he was burning numberless lamps
for numerous days,
by the grace of the Lord
who wanted to make known to the world
the doings of the virtuous true servitor,
the enterprises for the growth of the wealth,
which was pouring in unceasingly, died out
even as the fruits of his twin deeds
died on this earth.

4029-8.

* * *

Even after the jingle-jangle of the thriving wealth
had subsided and died away,
the great man who did not desist
from his holy service of proud distinction
continued to render his service

by means of the commission earned
by selling oil obtained from his caste-people
and taking back the proceeds to them.

4030-9.

When this attempt too at earning wages
by taking oil from prosperous merchants
and selling it on their behalf
failed on account of those persons
not supplying oil for sale,
Kaliyar of depressed mind wished to work
in the yard where the oil-mill was,
and earn large wages.

4031-10.

* * *

He performed every kind of work in the oil-mill from filling
the mill with oil seeds and testing the oil extracted from the seeds,
to tending the bullocks driving the mill. He earned high wages
thereby, and continued to light lamps in the temple, thus becoming
a leading light in performing perfect service unto the Lord.

Sekkizhaar continues:

When, on account of the large number
of workers in that line,
he could not get by any means
sufficient earnings by that type of work,
he lost heart;
and when even the sale-proceeds of his house
with which he continued to light lamps
was exhausted,
he sought a way to sell his wife
of ineffable merit.

4033-12.

* * *

Rejoicing in his mind, his wife he took
to the prosperous city,
but finding nowhere anyone
who would pay money for her,
he became distressed,
he, who had never known even in his dreams
any obstacle to his work
of lighting beautiful lamps
in the holy temple of the Lord with the raging bull,
now entered the temple in a helpless state. 4034-13.

* * *

When the time came
 to render the service of lighting the series of lamps
 in the temple of Patam-pakka-naayakar
 who had enslaved him,
 he swore with determined mind,
 "If the flames of ruby-hue die out
 I too shall die",
 and proceeded to fulfil that deed.

4035-14.

* * *

He placed the wicks in the beautiful lamp-bowls
 which he placed around him,
 and, intending to fill the bowls with his own blood
 in place of the unavailable oil,
 he began cutting his own throat with a tool.
 Forthwith, the Lord with an eye also on the forehead,
 appeared in person
 and, with welling compassion,
 graciously took hold of his hand.

4036-15.

* * *

And when, before him, the Lord graciously appeared
 riding on the young bull,
 the wound disappeared,
 and the skin was as beautiful as ever before.
 And Kaliyar stood before the Lord
 in worshipping pose with joined palms
 held over his head.
 Him the Lord graciously ordained
 to everlasting abode
 in the beautiful Kingdom of Heaven.

4037-16.

* * *

(v)

Lighting lamps was not the only manner by which servitors worshipped the temple as Haran Himself. There was a servitor who ground sandal paste for the adornment of the body of the image in the temple in the form of a casing, called 'kavacham'. He was an expert in this form of service. The finished work makes the image look as if cast in gold.

This servitor, Moorthi by name, and a Vaisya by caste, lived in Madurai, the capital of Pandinaadu.

Sekkizhaar relates:

He was engaged unwaveringly in the act
of providing sandal-paste casing
to our Father of Aalavaayil,
Lord Civan, who wears on His russet matted locks
the twilight moon.

977-10.

* * *

In the days he was engaged to the delight of devotees of Lord Civan in such dear-to-the-heart service, the country was invaded by the Vaduga-karunaadars, a tribe from the present Karnataka, and their chieftain became the King of Pandinaadu. He came under the influence of Jainism and did everything in his power to harass the devotees of Lord Civan. Moorthinaayanar was one of the targets of his harassment. Sekkizhaar relates:

In spite of his doing endless spiteful acts,
our devotee continued to perform uninterruptedly
his former manner of service.
Who could obstruct our great men
who stand steadfast
in their dedicated life of service
as suited their respective greatness?

953-16.

* * *

The King, as a crowning piece of his criminal cruel acts, closed to our devotee the department from which he was obtaining sandal wood. Sandal wood trees, wherever grown, are the property of the state. Sekkizhaar relates that the devotee said to himself:

"Even though there is an obstacle today
to providing the good holy body-salve
which He who performs the cosmic dance uses,
this arm which abrades the wood will not cease!"
Saying so, on the circular stone he set his forearm
and rubbed it till the skin, sinews and bone
wore off and melted away.

987-20.

* * *

The forearm rubbed against the stone bled
and split to the very bones
and the marrow within;

But since our Lord could not bear the sight,
there arose in the night-air a gracious voice
which said:

988-21.

* * *

"Desist doing thus, O Sir,
out of daring born of your devotion.
Recover all the country robbed by him
who committed cruel deeds unto you,
expunge the evils which had entered the land,
protect the country and perform your service
and arrive at our great Kingdom."

989-22.

So indeed it happened to the very letter. The wicked king and the dynasty died out; an elephant sent round the country to select a successor spotted out our servitor who was crowned king, with the sacred ash serving as the article for anointment, the Rudraksha beads as his jewellery, and a coil of matted locks like the locks of Lord Civan as his crown.

(vi)

In the case of Kungkiliya-k-kalaya-naayanar, Kalayar for short, who hailed from a Brahmana family of Thirukkadavoor, which is situated at about 20 kilometres from Mayilaaduthurai, on the road to Tharangampaadi, the worship of the Temple as Haran Himself took the form of burning frankincense at the shrine of Lord Civan.

Sekkizhaar relates:

In the days he observed this course of service,
as want grew apace,
good lands all were sold,
sold were dependent slaves,
thus various kinds of vast wealth vanished;
dependent kith and kin in his household
and his children suffered in consequence.

838-8.

* * *

With nothing left in the house,
and two days passed without any food,
his loving wife, seeing the suffering children

and the large number of relatives,
into the hands of Kalayanaar, her husband,
gave her blemishless auspicious Thaali*
strung on a string,
and said: "Buy paddy with this!"

839-9.

* * *

When he was going along
to buy paddy with the Thaali,
a merchant bearing matchless frankincense
appeared before him.

Kalayar asked: "What does the bag contain?"
and being told the contents,
the devotee of chest adorned by a three-strand thread,
his face beaming with joy, said:

840-10.

* * *

"If this is fragrant frankincense
fit for the Pooja of the Lord of beautiful eyes
who carries a river on His russet locks,
I am blessed indeed!
What greater good fortune than this
could there be?
After getting this good fortune
what further is there to get?"
Thus said he with exceeding joy,
and continued:,

841-11.

* * *

"Gold will I give, give me this."
On his saying so,
the merchant replied: "It suits me."
When the Thaali Kalayar gave,
the merchant received it at once
and gave the bag in exchange;
Kalayar received it,
didn't tarry there any more,
but hurried away with welling joy,

842-12.

* * *

*thaali is a trinket of gold strung on a string and worn round the neck as a symbol of the married state of a woman. It corresponds to the wedding ring of the West.

The domain of the Rider
 on the Bull of doughty deed
 he speedily reached,
 deposited the bag of frankincense
 in the store room of the Lord
 who has me as His slave
 and who wields sway over me,
 forgot everything else,
 paid obeisance with welling love
 to the blossomy feet of the Lord of matted locks,
 and stayed content,
 he who had no peer.

843-13.

* * *

While the devotee abode there,
 by the grace of our Lord,
 Kuberan, the King of Azhakaapuri—
 (the Croesus of the Hindu Pantheon)
 scrapped together all his wealth,
 and, crowding the world with it,
 deposited it as heaps of gold and paddy
 and other forms of prosperity
 in every nook and corner
 of the house of our servitor.

844-14.

* * *

Lord Civan made known this access of prosperity to the starving wife in her dreams. She woke to see that it was no dream but a reality, paid obeisance to the Lord with joined palms, and set about preparing food for her great husband. At the bidding of the Lord, Kalayanaar went home, saw the riches, praised the Lord, enjoyed the food which his wife served him, and used the riches for more intense service unto the Lord and His devotees.

(vii)

'Were I to define Dasa-margam' sings the author of Civa-gnaana-siddhiyar in that famous work,

it is.....
 plucking flowers and stringing
 many garlands and chaplets for the Lord.....

A servitor who gained Mukti by no other means than just stringing many garlands and chaplets for the Lord, Murukar by name, was born in Poompukaloor famed as the place where Appar met Sambandhar for the second time and accompanied him on a long, long pilgrimage to Thirumarai-k-kaadu, and more famed as the place where Appar sought eternal rest at the feet of Lord Civan, singing the famous decad which is headed by the following soul-stirring stanza:

Thinker as I am
 what shall I dwell upon and think
 unless I think of nothing else
 than the feet of my Lord?
 I who have no other succour, eyeless would be,
 unless with joined palms, I see
 nothing other than your anklet-girt feet.
 O Lord, in the one dwelling, my body,
 You provided nine doors;
 when they all are shut at the same time,
 I will not experience this feeling;
 O Virtuous One, to Your feet I am coming,
 O Virtuous One who abide in Poompukaloor!

VI-d-99.1.st.

* * *

Sekkizhaar, who had made on the former two occasions no more than a mention of the name of Poompukaloor, now makes ample amends and devotes no less than four stanzas to describe the glory of this shrine. He sings:

Poompukaloor,
 girt by ponds
 surrounded by vast groves of trees crowned by flowers
 in the River Cauvery-traversed country
 of the Cola Kings wearing crowns
 set with gems capped by an aureole of light
 is a city loved by Lord Civan, our Hope,
 Who wears a water-logged chaplet of matted locks
 on the crown of His form,
 which the Mountain-maid of tresses
 encircled by a band of pollen-laden flowers
 encircles with Her tendril-like arms.

* * *

In that ancient city of noted name,
 by the perfect light
 of the protective sacred ash's splendid whiteness,
 which matched the whiteness of the minds
 of those who wore it,
 even the midnight's darkness turned into light;
 not the light only—
 even the beautiful buzzing bumble bees
 feeding on the delectable honey
 of the fragrant flowers
 shone shorn of their sable colour.

* * *

On the bards, the humble bees
 buzzing beside them,
 the just-about-to-blossom buds
 squirted colourful delicious honey.
 Not from the mouths of flowers only—
 the precious mouths
 of the young and delicate mynahs of musical speech
 also poured forth delicious honey-sweet decads.

* * *

On the bumble bees humming around them
 the lotus floating on the waters of the tank
 would blossom,
 their eyes brimming with tears of honey.
 Not the fragrance-laden blossoming buds
 of the cool lotus only—
 On the ambrosia of the sacred songs
 on the Lord of the Devas flowing forth,
 the lotus-like faces of the devotees
 drinking in that ambrosia with their ears
 would also brim with drops of tears. 1017 to 1020—1 to 4

* * *

In that cool Pukaloor
 of such glory and prosperity
 was born Murukanaar in a Brahmana family of repute.

1021-5

* * *

Staying in and leading his life
 at Thiruppukaloor,
 where the dawn was hailed

by the crab asleep on the lotus leaves
 waking and slipping into the waters of the fertile field,
 by the lotus buds therein
 blossoming with blushing petals,
 by the Kayal fish in the same fields
 leaping over the sluice shutters,
 Murukanaar,
 by privilege true surrender as serf
 to the Lord who comes astride a bull,
 led his life plucking at dawn
 thiru-p-palli-th-thaamam—
 flowers, leaves, and fragrant roots—
 and rendering them as offering to the Lord
 for Him to wear on His matted locks.

* * *

He woke from sleep before day-break,
 and, after bathing in sacred waters,
 would set out to the flower-gardens
 and pluck and collect in separate baskets
 in limitless abundance buds
 in just about to blossom stage
 which would break out in smiling radiance
 when they were strung into a chaplet
 and wound round the crown
 of the Lord's matted locks
 on the promenade of which
 the river of sacred waters
 and the moon parade themselves.

* * *

Flowers that grow on trees,
 on the ground, on shrubs
 many petalled ones on climbing creepers,
 flowers that grow on cold water,
 of all such, carefully he chose choice flowers
 worthy to deck the sacred crown of Him who,
 with a smile blossoming on the lips
 from which the Vedas burgeon,
 stretched the snake of many hoods as a bow string
 on the bow of the Golden Meru,

* * *

and, bringing them home,
 sat in a secluded spot,

1022 to 1025—6 to 9.

And he wove armlets, anklets, bouquets, chaplets, corsage, garlands, posies, sprays, wreaths, all for the Lord's adornment. He performed these services in the hours set apart for them, and taking the floral offering to the Lord's sanctum sanctorum and, adorning Him with them, he performed the liturgical services at the appointed hours and cherished the Lord by thought, word and deed. All the while his unceasing tongue chanted the eminent Mystic Five Letters dear to the Transcendent Being.

Eschewing the excepted course of conduct of life, our Vedic Brahmana conducted his life, and gained the glory of claiming Thirugnaanasambandhar as his friend.

Murukar, who thuswise led a lofty life,
joined, by virtue of the liturgical services
performed in the past,
in the famous celebration
of the wedding of the Son from Pukali,
and, on the Lord who owns a ruddy-eyed raging bull
graciously bestowing on him
the fruits of His grace,
gained the grand privilege
of abiding at the Great Lord's feet.

1029-13.

*

*

*

(viii)

Among all the chronicles of the servitors of the Lord who worshipped the temple of Haran as Haran Himself, the chronicle of Thandiatikal stands out as a unique one. For he was blind from birth. He lived in Thiruvaaroor.

Jains were very many in Thiruvaaroor in the days of Thandiatikal and they had trespassed into the very precincts of the temple of Lord Civan and had encroached even on the banks of the Kamalalayam, the tank to the west of the temple. It is said that the blind are compensated by the acute development of other organs of perception. In the case of our servitor of the Lord, the loss of the physical eye-sight was compensated by the endowment of spiritual sight called 'gnaana-k-kan', 'eye of gnosis' as opposed to 'oona-k-kan', 'eye of flesh'. He decided to compensate the loss of the width of the tank by increase of its depth.

He groped his way to the centre of the tank and erected a pole there-at to which he tied one end of a rope and carried and tied the other end to a pole planted on the bank. Making his way to and from the centre of the tank by the aid of this rope, he started digging deep into the bowels of the tank.

Immediately the Jains raised an uproar saying that digging into the earth would cause the death of many creatures buried in the mud. They abused and assaulted the servitor, and pulled up the poles and did away with the lead rope. The climax was reached when the Jain taunted the servitor in stinging words. Sekkizhaar relates:

The persons sans-wisdom, on hearing
the words of him of limitless wisdom,
pondered over his words and said:
"You won't listen to these words of righteousness;
have you lost your hearing too?"
They added: "Dull wit, blindness and deafness,
all together, you alone have in this world!"
On hearing which the devotee said:

3599-8.

* * *

"Other than the fragrant lotus-feet
of the Lord who with His bow
burnt the Cities Three,
I do not see anything else;
How could you ever understand it?
O men of uncertain dogma,
if, devoid of any perception,
your eyes go blind,
and I see with all the worlds as witness,
what will you do?"
Thus he flung a challenge!

3600-9.

* * *

On hearing this, the Jains replied:
"If, by the grace of your God,
you gain your eye-sight,
we shall no longer stay in the city
where we have waxed in prosperity!"
Saying so, they snatched away the spade from him
with their rough hands,



and tore up the poles along with the guide rope,
thus did they who tear up the hair on their head. 3601-10.

* * *

Thandi-atikal went up to the gates of the temple, prayed for redress against the shame inflicted on him, went up to his mutt and sank into troubled sleep. The Lord appeared to him in a dream and said:

“Shed the grievance you are harbouring
in your mind,
you will see that you see with your eyes
and the perfidious Jains’ eyesight fades;
fear not!”

Saying so, He went from him that very night
to the King in his dreams
and graciously said:

3604-13.

* * *

"When Thandi was digging a tank for us,
the Jains, who saw it, unable to tolerate it,
used force and obstructed the work;
he is angry thereby;
go unto him and fulfil his wish
according to his notion!"

Thus He graciously made him grasp the problem
that the devotee's distress may be relieved,
He who realised the work of the servitor.

3605-14.

* * *

The King woke up, and recollecting his dream, went to the servitor who stated his plaint, concluding with the statement of his challenge and the response of the Jains. The King then sent for the Jains and, with their consent, went to the tank, with the servitor going in front of him. Standing close to the tank, he turned to our servitor and said: "O man of great Thavam! Do show us how you will get your eye-sight by the grace of the Lord!" On the King bidding him thus, the great man, declaimed:

"If it is true that
I am a suitable slave unto Civan,
I will gain today my eyesight,
and the Jains all through Thiruvaroor,
will lose their eye-sight
in the presence of the King!
The choicest wealth, the Five Letters are!"
Saying so, the perfect servitor dived
into the crystal clear waters of the tank,
chanting loudly the Letters Five.

3610-19.

* * *

The servitor who rose to the surface praising the Lord gained clear eye-sight, and the Jains, on the other hand, lost their eyesight and tottered about, and soon went away from Thiruvaaroor.

12. VIOLENT VOTARIES

(Clause 3b of 12th Soothram of Civa-gnaana-bhodham)

Worship the Temple as Haran Himself

This chapter, no doubt, deals with devotees serving in the temple just like those in the former chapter, but these were very very zealous in their concept and discharge of such services. Not only did they perform the services to perfection but wanted others also to do so. They were not merely zealous devotees, they were zealots.

There were eight of them. All Varnas, castes, were represented in that number. The foremost of them was a Brahmana lad. He hailed from a village called Seingaloor, situated at a distance of about two and three quarters of a kilometre to the west of Thirupp-anandal, the seat of one of three most important Caivite Mutts in Tamilnaadu. The first stanza of the chronicle of this lad by Sekkizhaar is an outstanding example of Sekkizhaar's skill in packing into a stanza of four lines comprising twenty-five words a great volume of information. He sings:

In the country of waters
which the fresh and cool River Ponni (Cauvery)
ever and always unfailingly supplies,
on the southern bank of the River Manni
running through that country,
long ago eternally established by Senthān,
(Lord Murukan)
who was to display the prowess of His spear
by cleaving with it the Krauncha Hill
and by destroying the cruel army of the Soorars,
enemies of the Devas,
was ancient prosperous Seingaloor,
the abode of holy Brahmanas.

1206-1.

*

*

*

Seingaloor, besides being famous as a very ancient place founded by Lord Murukan Himself in ancient times, was famous

in historical times as one of five places in Tamilnadu where the Cola Kings were crowned as Kings. The other four were Woriyoor now a part of Tiruchirapalli, Karoor a town in present Tiruchirapalli District, Thiruvaaroor, and Kaaviripoompattinam, more well known in Epic and in modern times as Poompuhaar, the town on the delta where the River Cauvery enters the sea.

Seingaloor was, perhaps, a town not merely preponderantly inhabited by Brahmanas, but a town solely inhabited by them. Sekkizhaar devotes as many as five stanzas following the first one to describe the daily routine of brahmanical ritualistic activities of that town. The first of these five stanzas, the second of the chronicle, is again a remarkable one. With poetic artistry it tell us what manner of life marks out a Brahmana from the rest of the people.

Sekkizhaar thus defines them:

In the matter of wearing
 the perfect white ash, of one mind they were;
 distinguished they were by their births too;
 they followed the practice
 of burning the fires three;
 study regularly did they
 the Vedas four;
 capable they were of putting behind them
 the senses five;
 Brahmanas they were
 whom even the dwellers in heavens above praised
 for the sincerity with which they discharged
 the duties six.

1207-2.

* * *

The six duties are learning and teaching the Vedas, performing sacrifices and getting sacrifices performed by others, giving and receiving gifts.

In such a place and in such a clan of Brahmanas, a son was born to Echcha-dhaththan of Kaasyapa-gotram and was named Vichaarasaruman. Saruman is the form of the Sanskrit term Sarma, a surname which every Brahmana of the Advaitic persuasion can take. On reaching the age of seven, the child was, as usual, invested with the sacred thread.

On one occasion, the child happened to witness a cowherd thrashing a recently calved cow which had threatened him with its horns. The child promptly intervened and saved the cow from the beating.

He pondered over all he had learnt about the unique greatness of the cow over all the living creatures. Sekkizhaar records the lad's musings thus:

Of all the wombs in which creatures
abide before birth,
the greatest in glory are the wombs of cows;
pulsating purifying waters,
all for ever abide in the cows;
do not the cows have limbs and organs
to which noted Devas and holy sages
throng and dwell for always and ever!

1224-19.

* * *

It is on account of such glory
that the cows from the day they yield calves
have the privilege of supplying
for the Lord who dances on the Hall in Thillai
the five sacred articles to bathe with delight
the sacred coil of matted locks
which are adorned by a chaplet
containing the waxing crescent moon,
the river, and the garland of shining skulls.—1225-20.

* * *

When it is stated that these pure herds of cows
are the physique from which incarnates
the raw material which yields the ash
worn by the Dancer of blue throat
and russet matted locks
who is the First Cause which protects
all the universe through all ages
with the assistance of Devas of special merit,
what other conclusion can one come to,
(than that the greatest in glory are the wombs of cows?)

1226-21.

* * *

Is there anything more to think about?
 Does not this herd of cows belong to the genus
 of the divine raging great Bull
 which bears on its back the Lord
 who holds a frisky deer in one hand,
 and whose matted locks hold the waters of the Ganges
 which reflect the scintillating light
 of the gems of the snake which He wears
 along with His Consort?

1227-22.

* * *

Thus the compassionate boy argued with himself before dismissing the cowherd and taking upon himself the duty of tending the herd. The herd thrived under his loving care, and the owners were very pleased by the change of cowherd. The herd thrived so well that milk began to spurt of its own accord from the teats of the cows under the sheer weight of the milk collected in the udder. This spontaneous spouting of milk evoked in the mind of the young boy a vision of Lord Civan being bathed with a jet of milk from a bowl with a tiny hole at its bottom.

Translation of the vision into reality was, in the case of the imaginative lad, a matter of a moment. Sekkizhaar records:

On that very spot, as a continuation,
 the ritualistic worship of a former birth took shape
 as a playful act under an Aaththi tree
 on a sand-bank on the River Manni
 He shaped out of the sand
 a holy form of Lord Civan
 and erected over it a temple
 with a tall tower and encircling walls. 1237-32.

* * *

Soon, the young lad was absorbed in elaborate worship of the Lord with flowers and incense. The ritualistic bathing of the Lord with milk held the most important place in the worship, the cows yielding potfuls of milk for the purpose. The udders of the cows, however, remained as much swollen with milk as ever before; the yield to the owners in the village did not decrease by even a drop of milk.

This worship went undetected for a long time till one day a passer-by noted the rivulets of milk on the sand-bank which led him to the lad engaged in bathing the Lord with milk. The stranger reported the matter to the owners of the cows, and they sent for Vichara-saruman's father and complained bitterly to him about the conduct of his son. He pleaded ignorance of what had happened, but assured them that if such a thing happened in the future, it will be his fault. Next morning, he stealthily followed the herd of cows and his son, and to his horror found that what the Brahmanas had said was only too true. With mounting anger he witnessed the play of his son at worshipping the Lord with a bath of milk spurted by the cows at the touch of their teats by the tender fingers of the child. Sekkizhaar relates what happened thereafter:

The moment he saw the pooja,
he hurriedly slid down the tree he was seated on,
and hastened forward,
and with the staff in his hand,
he smote his son on his back,
and cursed him in cruel words.
But the service-conducting
little great eminent one,
by his lavish love of his Lord
concentrated in His worship,
was unaware of this other happening.

1254-49.

* * *

Seeing that the great one greater than all else,
even when the enraged one
hit him several times,
was unaware of anything extraneous
and was unflagging in the act
of bathing the Lord,
the bewildered Brahmana became berserk,
and the pot of milk for the sacred bath
with his foot he spurned and spilt,
he who with the act of his hand
already stood at the head of the vile.

1255-50.

* * *

The young lad, who noticed the spilling of the milk,
recognised in an instant the wicked person
to be his father;



and, as he deserved to have his legs spilt,
took hold of the nearby lying staff
now transformed into a hatchet
by the grace of the Lord,
and severed his legs.

Forthwith on the ground fell the Brahmana.

1256-51.

* * *

The self-same swung staff
turning into a weapon
to remove the obstacle to his Pooja,
the son, who severed therewith
the twin feet of his father
who obstructed his Pooja,
now having got rid of the obvious obstacle
to his Pooja,
began to worship as before.

On his doing so,
the Lord of long and thick-set matted locks,
with His Consort mounted the bull,

1257-52.

* * *

and
 with a band of ghouls surrounding Him,
 and accompanied by Munis and Devas
 reciting slokas from the Vedas,
 the Immaculate Lord, His heart filled with love,
 appeared before the boy.
 On the Lord doing so,
 the lad of mature devotion saw Him,
 rejoiced in his heart,
 and fell at His blossomy feet.

1258-53.

* * *

The Lord of matted locks
 encircled by a chaplet of Kondrai flowers
 took up in His arms the boy who had prostrated
 at His twin feet;
 looked at him and graciously said:
 "For Our sake, you struck down
 the father who begot you;
 in future, next to him we are Father to you."
 Saying so, He embraced the boy,
 and, with welling compassion,
 kissed him on his crown and rejoiced.

1259-54.

* * *

The lad who had been touched
 by the lotus-like hand
 of the Lord with the bull of blood-shot eyes,
 on that spot his carnal body
 turned into a body invested with Civan-hood,
 bathed as it was
 in the bubbling fountain of holy grace,
 and shone in the ether around
 while Brahma and all great Devas
 stood on earth adoring him.

1260-55.

* * *

The Lord of the Devas
 appointed our servitor
 as Chief over all servitors,

and saying:

"The plate in which We eat,
 the clothes We wear, the ornaments We put on,

all to you We give,
and confer on you the position of Sandeesan".
The Lord took the chaplet of Kondrai flowers
worn on the crescent moon-adorned matted locks
of His beautiful head
and crowned him with it.

1261-56.

* * *

Saint Thirugnaanasambandhar has sung a stanza on this incident
in his famous Thiruppaasuram. He sings:

Haven't you heard the Knowledgeable Ones say
when Sandeswar cut off his father's foot,
which came into contact with the crown
of the image of the Lord he was worshipping
with fragrant just-about-to-blossom flowers
in his hand,
he reached the haven of the feet of the Lord
with three eyes.

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* * *

Sekkizhaar's account of the incident differs from that of Sambandhar
who lived five centuries before him. Sambandhar relates that the
foot of Sandeswar's father came into contact with the crown of the
Image of the Lord. Evidently, either the details of the incident
got changed in the memory of people in the course of five centuries
or Sekkizhaar, unwilling to entertain the thought of anyone kicking
at the crown of the Image of the Lord, had changed the incident into
one of kicking at the pot of milk. It will be conceded that Sam-
bandhar's account must be held to be more correct. In the circum-
stances, the picture illustrating this incident in this book follows
Sambandhar's account.

(ii)

Kotpuli-nayanar was a Velaalar who hailed from Naatiyath-
thaankudi in the Chola Kingdom. He was Commander-in-Chief
of the army of the Chola King. Sekkizhaar relates:

All the bounty of great magnitude
received from the King
he employed since a long time ago
in the sacred task of establishing granaries

of mountainous heaps of best quality of paddy
 for the increase in the quota
 for the offering of cooked rice
 in every temple of the Lord
 with the special hair-do
 on which He wears a moon.

4136-3.

* * *

While he led his life in this manner, one day the King sent him on a campaign against his enemies. Before he set out, he stored as much paddy as he could that it might last till his return,

And said to whosoever were his relatives,
 to each one of them separately:
 "These are the stocks of paddy
 for the rice-offering to my Father, Lord Civan;
 On whosoever even thinks in his mind,
 to despoil these,
 I lay a curse in the Lord's name.
 With these words of good advice,
 he left for the war against the King's enemies.

4137-4.

When he was away on the war-front, a great drought set in, bringing in its train a severe famine. His relatives decided that it is better to live by taking the grain stored for the offering of rice to the Lord than die of starvation. So they broke open the granaries and took the paddy, intending to replace it later on. But they didn't.

Meanwhile, Kotpuliyaar returned from the war and learnt about the crime committed by his relatives. Without their getting to know about it, he decided to kill all his relatives. Sekkizhaar relates:

To the relatives who received him
 at the gates of the town,
 he spoke several sweet words,
 and, on arriving at his gem-set mansion
 on top of which the moon seems to rest,
 he instructed his servants
 to invite all his relatives in the town
 that he might present them
 with fine clothes and lavish gifts
 in cash and kind.

4140-7.

* * *

When everyone had come in,
 the good man made a pretence of bestowing largesses,
 and, after having set a man
 bearing his own name
 at the exit as a guard,
 he bellowed in a rage,
 "Would I desist from killing my sinful kinsmen
 who violated the stern ban
 I had decreed in the name of the Lord
 and despoiled the paddy for the rice-offering!"
 and committed the massacre.

4141-8.

* * *

Fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters,
 wives, close relatives, slaves in the town,
 and all the rest
 who were willing parties to the eating
 of the paddy for the sacred offering of rice
 to our Father who wears a moon on His crown,
 he smote with his sword



and felled them all to the ground—
he who would thereby sunder
their births, fruits of evil Karma.

4142-9.

* * *

Then, when the guard who bore his name
pointed to an infant
which had escaped the holocaust,
and said:
“This has not partaken of that rice!”
he retorted:
“It had fed on the milk of a woman who
had fed on the paddy!”
and tossed the child in the air
and slashed it into two pieces
with his lightning-like well forged sword.

4143-10.

* * *

At that juncture,
Lord Civan revealed Himself
before the devotee,
and graciously said:
“While your kinsmen whose bonds of attachments
have been severed by the sword
borne by you
enter and abide in the world
superior to the world of the Devas,
you come just as you are
and abide with Us!”
Bidding him in these words,
the Lord graciously departed.

4144-11.

* * *

(iii)

Man, woman, child, or even beast, whoever offended against the reverence due to the Lord, or a devotee of the Lord, or to articles for use in the worship of the Lord incurred the wrath of a servitor of the Lord and invited summary punishment. Sivakaamiyaar was a devotee of the Lord in Karoor, a town about eighty kilometres to the west of Tiruchirapalli. He was in the habit of gathering flowers in the very early morning for use in the worship of the Lord in Aanilai, the temple in Karoor where abides the Lord.

In the same town lived a servitor of the servitors of the Lord. Sekkizhaar describes him thus:

In that temple of the Immaculate One
who was beyond reach of the Holy Vedas
pregnant with meaning,
he engaged himself in worship
in a manner which would overcome
the enemy called delusive birth;
to those who had gained the privilege of serfdom
unto the Lord who had contained
the black poison in His throat,
he was in the habit of performing
great services of spiritual merit.
Such a one was Eripaththar.

556-6.

* * *

To the end that Caivism might prevail victoriously
everywhere in this world prospering by the rains,
he always carried an unblemished battle-axe
praised by the ancient Vedas
and, appearing on the scene
like a lion charging from its cave
when anything untoward happened
to the devotees of the Lord
of flaming matted locks,
he swung the axe
and felled down all opponents.

(557-7)

* * *

One day, as usual, Sivakaamiyaar,
his senses alerted in the early morning,
went out, bathed in the waters,
tied over his mouth a strip of cloth,
entered the fragrant flower-garden
teeming with clusters of flowers,
felt with his hands and gathered
good, fragrant, about to blossom buds
suitable for adorning the Lord of the Devas.

559-9.

* * *

Carrying the basket of flowers in one hand and a staff in the other, he hastened towards the temple. While he was doing so, the royal elephant returning from its bath went berserk and rushing

up to him, snatched the basket of flowers slung on his staff and spilled all the flowers on the ground. The mahout saw the mischief done and, turning the elephant in another direction, hastened away. Sivakaamiyaar, furious at the outrage, ran after the animal to thrash it with his staff. As the elephant had gone beyond his reach, the old man unable to catch up with it tripped and fell down. Smiting the ground with his hand in his rage, he got up, and, wailing at the indescribable woe which had beset him, cried out "Civathaa!" In his distress, he appealed to Lord Civan.

Eripaththar who was coming from the opposite direction heard the cry for help and rushed up to the spot brandishing his battle axe and swearing that he would fell down the beast which had snatched the flowers from the devotee. He learnt the way by which the



elephant had gone, chased it and catching up with it, cut down its trunk when it turned upon him in fury. He also felled down two men who were on the elephant and three others who were accompanying the elephant.

The news spread like wild fire and reached the ears of the King, having undergone a transformation from an incident of a single

man killing an elephant to a huge force of an enemy invading the city. The king came at the head of a huge army to meet the invader and

..... did not find any alien enemies,
but only a devotee armed with a battle axe
and looking like a two-trunked truculent elephant.

He found that the man standing before the fallen elephant was a mere devotee of Lord Civan. He could not imagine him to be the killer, and thundered: "Who overpowered this?" The mahouts informed him that it was no other than the man armed with a battle axe and standing before the elephant was the culprit.

The King concluded that there must have been enough justification for the outrage if this person was the culprit. Thereupon, he quickly got down from his horse, approached our servitor and begged for details of what had happened. On hearing the true facts, the King fell at the feet of our servitor and said:

"The offence committed
against the devotee of the Lord of beautiful eyes,
will not be wiped out by this only;
you should kill me also.

But it is not proper procedure
to kill with the auspicious battle-axe;
this is the suitable weapon."

Saying which,
he who would expiate the offence with his life
pulled out his sword
and gave it into the hands of the servitor.

592-42.

* * *

Looking at the King who was extending
the sword sparkling like a hot flame,
the servitor cried out;

"Ah! I am ruined!

Today I saw the infinitude of the devotion
of this King of bournelss fame!

Saying so, he would not receive the sword;
but, fearing that the King would himself
put an end to his life,
he later received the sword,
he who would prevent an evil act.

593-43

* * *

The King stood in worshipping pose
before him who had received the sword,
and said to himself;
“I have been rendered a great favour
by this person here
which enables me to expiate my fault
by being killed at this spot with this sword”.
Eripaththar who watched him rejoice
was frightened by it.

594-44.

* * *

And said to himself:

“I thought ill of this devotee
who, even when his mighty massive elephant
along with the mahouts had been killed,
gave into my hands his sword
and said: “Kill me also
for my great offence”

and concluded:

“To put an end to my life immediately
is the end to this problem.”

595-45.

* * *

When, thinking so,
he put the sword given by the King
to his neck and was cutting it,
the King exclaimed:

“What kind of a deed is this
of this great man! I am ruined!”
and rushed towards him
and caught both the sword and his hand
with his mighty arms.

596-46.

* * *

While the Cola King was tightly grasping the hand
without loosening his hold,
and Eripaththar, the man of great Thavam,
stood frustrated thereby,
in order to solve the contretemps
which had arisen as a result of boundless love,
by the grace of the Lord with a compassionate eye
on the forehead,
a voice within hearing of everyone arose
from the skies of illuminating light.

597-47.

* * *

"O you of devotion worthy of worship!
 In order to demonstrate on this earth
 your servitude,
 the spilling of the pure sacred flowers today
 by the rampaging elephant
 happened by the grace of the Dancer
 adorned by a chaplet bearing a baby-moon."
 Even while the voice rose in the sky,
 along with its mahouts the elephant rose to its feet.

598-48.

* * *

Abandoning the sword set to sever his head,
 Eripaththar fell prostrate at the feet
 of the Cola King,
 and the King of Kings threw aside
 the forged sword of many wars,
 stretched himself flat on the ground;
 and paid obeisance at Eripaththar's feet;
 the heaven-dwellers showered on them
 a rain of cool flowers.

599-49.

* * *

(iv)

Kalikkambar was a merchant, a banya hailing from Pennakatam in South Arcot District, 18 Kilometres from Vriddhachalam Railway station. Sekkizhaar relates:

This devotee was engaged every day
 in providing food to devotees of Haran.
 Rice of high quality, delectable curries,
 ghee, curd, cream of milk,
 fruit sweeter than honey, sugar-candy,
 all this to perfection he served,
 and, besides, he bestowed on the devotees
 other riches as much as they wanted.

4014-3.

* * *

When he was doing service to the devotees
 in this manner,
 one day, he,
 who was about to feed in the traditional manner
 the devotees who had come to dine at his house,
 firstly called all of them into the house
 and was engaged in washing
 their sacred feet.

4015-4.

* * *

When the beloved husband was engaged
in washing the feet of all the men of great Thavam
with his wife,
who had cleaned the entire house,
and had prepared the rice,
curries of agreeable taste,
pure water,
and other kinds of eatables,
pouring the water from the jug,

4016-5.

* * *

there appeared before him belatedly a person
who had once been a servant of his household
but had left the service in anger
and had become a devotee
of the Lord who wears bones and snakes
as ornaments.
He has now arrived in the holy guise
along with those who were going to Kalikkambar's house.
Our magnanimous servitor began to wash
and clean his feet.

4017-6.

* * *

While he held the devotee's feet with his hand,
the fragrant flower-strewn water
from the jug ceased to flow
when his beloved wife realised
that the devotee looked like
a former member of her household
who had left the service.
Our servitor par-excellence looked up at his wife
and pondered in his mind.

4018-7.

* * *

"Devotee of the Lord
with His crown adorned by the fragrant kondrai
is this person here;
shrinking away from him
on account of his former state
she refrained from pouring the water"
Thus deciding in his mind,
and without reviewing the deed,
he took out his sword,
took away the jug,



severed her hand,
himself took up the jug,
poured water,
and washed the feet of the devotee.

4019-8.

* * *

Having washed the feet,
he himself made all the arrangements
for feeding the devotees,
and with unwavering mind
fed the devotees.

The man of immeasurable greatness
continued afterwards in doing the service
befitting him,
and later merged with the devotees
in the haven of the feet
of the Lord Who harbours the poison
in His throat.

4020-9.

(v)

Saththi-nayanar was another violent votary of Lord Civan.
He hailed from Varinjaiyoor, a village at about seven-kilometres
from Keezhveloor, now called Keevaloor, a railway station on the
line from Thiruvaaroor to Naagaippattinam. He was a Velaalar
by birth. Sekkizhaar relates:

He was a person
who had the daring
to pull out and cut off the tongues
which mothered the words
which spoke ill of the devotees
of our Father, the Lord of beautiful eyes.

4041-3.

To deprive the tongue of the graceless
who spoke slanders,
he pulled it out with the crook
of the weapon called Dandaayudham
and cut it off with a sharp knife.
He excelled in this supreme sacred
service of love.

4042-4.

This kind of manly sacred service he performed skilfully in
this world for many a long time and established the righteous
way of life of the Lord with a river on His crown. Sekkizhaar
concludes:

Our brave sacred servitor who staunchly performed
this undoubtedly rare sacred service
for the redemption of the world

arrived in due course at the haven
of the rosy Feet of the Dancer
on the gem-set Hall.

4044-6.

* * *

(vi)

Serru-th-thunai-nayanar was another servitor who belonged to the Velaalar community. He hailed from a village called the Keezhath-thanjavoor, an hour and a half journey on foot to the south-east of Thirumarukal which is about six kilometres from Nannilam, a railway station on the Thanjavoor-Naagapattinam line.

One day, when this servitor was doing some work in the courtyard of the temple in Thiruvaaroor,

The Royal Consort, the Principal Queen
of Pallavar-kochchingar who ruled the world,
took a flower lying a little apart
in the Flower-Garland-Stringing Hall
and smelt it.

Unable to bear the offence
our servitor, descended from a line
of servitors of the Lord,
seized an instrument of shining jaws,
and, speedily arriving at where she stood,

4123-4.

* * *

took hold of her dark soft tresses,
dragged her down to the earth,
caught her beautiful nose,
and saying: "I shall cut off the nose
which smelt the flower
in the Sacred Hall of Flowers
set apart for flowers
which will adorn the head
of russet matted locks
of the Transcendent Being",
cut it off.

Thus did he, our unique foremost servitor.

4124-5.

* * *



The lion-like servitor,
who performed this service
which came his way,
continued to perform in the sea-girt world
service befitting a slave of the Lord,
with His head adorned with Kondrai flowers
which looked like a garland of strung flowers,
that the world may thereby be redeemed,
and finally arrived at the haven
of the Foot lifted in dancing pose
on the Hall of Gold,
and enjoyed undying bliss.

4125-6.

(vii)

Kazharrhinga-naayanaar was the Pallava King the nose of whose queen was mutilated by Serruththunai-naayaanaar. The King and the queen had come to worship at the temple in Thiruva-roor. It was then that the queen happened to pick up the flower lying in the courtyard and smelt it. We know what happened to her. The King came upon the scene of his queen lying on the ground with a bleeding nose and wailing loud at the injury and indignity inflicted on her. The king angrily asked everyone around who had fearlessly done this foul deed. Sekkizhaar relates:

When at that juncture Serrutthunai the devotee
 came up to him and related to him
 what had happened before,
 the King looked at him and asked:
 "But should not the punishment
 befitting this offence
 be inflicted in accordance with the manner
 in which the crime took shape?"

4104-9.

* * *

Saying so, he pulled out the scimitar stuck in his waist band and cut off the hand of his queen. At this, the heaven-dwellers applauded and rained showers of flowers on him. The King who executed this unique act of justice reigned for a long time and in the end reached the haven of the feet of Lord Civan.

* * *

(viii)

Arivaattaaya-nayanar hajled from Kannamangalam, a village in Thanjavoor District, about 30 kilometres south of Thiruvaaroor, and at three-quarter of an hour's walk from Thiruththuraipoondi Junction on the Mayilaaduthurai-Kaaraikkudi railway line. The village is now extinct. He was a Velaalar, a landlord in the village. The name given to him at birth was Thaayanaar. Sekkizhaar relates:

Deeming that it would be a fit offering
 to Lord Civan, the Author of the Vedas,
 he cooked rice from reddish tinted paddy,

and a curry of reddish greens
 along with a pickle
 of clusters of whole tender young green mangoes—
 the servitor took every day
 and fed the Lord.

908-6.

* * *

The Lord, desirous of seeing his servitor serve Him with unswerving mind even in times of distress, made his wealth disappear without leaving a trace. Thaayanaar was unperturbed by the change in his fortunes and did not desist from his blameless daily deed. When poverty set in, Thaayanaar hired himself out as a labourer for harvesting the paddy, and with the superior quality of paddy he got as his wages he continued to provide offering of rice as before.

He and his family lived on the rice of the second quality of paddy paid as part of his wages. Lord Civan, intent on showing to the world the quality of devotion of Thaayanaar, made all the fields yield only the first quality of paddy. Thaayanaar rejoiced on noticing the quality of the produce, and fed the Lord all the paddy he got as wages, while he and his family lived on just the curry of greens. The plight of Thaayanaar grew still worse.

Sekkizhaar relates:

When even the greens growing around the house
 grew scarce,

his wife, who resembled Arundhati,
 the paragon of wifely virtues,
 poured water on his cupped hands
 for him to dine on.

Thus fed, he continued to carry out
 his chosen act of service to the Lord.

I shall now relate what happened
 one day to our chiefmost among servitors.

915-13.

* * *

Just as usual,
 in order to provide the offering of food
 to the Primeval Lord,
 the devotee devoid of any distress
 was going along bearing on his head a basket

containing first class rice
 pure as his love,
 pickled tender mangoes and delicious greens;
 his wife who followed behind
 carried in her hand the five articles*.

916-14.

* * *

As he was going along,
 his legs faltering on account of faintness,
 he tripped, and, on seeing everything
 falling into the fissure in the ground
 inspite of his wife lovingly encircling him
 with her hand carrying the mud vessel,
 our servitor of the Lord of the ghouls exclaimed:
 "What for should I go there any longer?"

917-15.

* * *

On the excellent rosy greens,
 the pure mango pickles,
 and the rice spilling away,
 he exclaimed:
 "Ah me of boundless evil! I have not gained here
 the blessing of the Lord,
 who dispels our miseries,
 graciously dining today on my offering",
 and straightaway began to hack at his throat
 with his sickle.

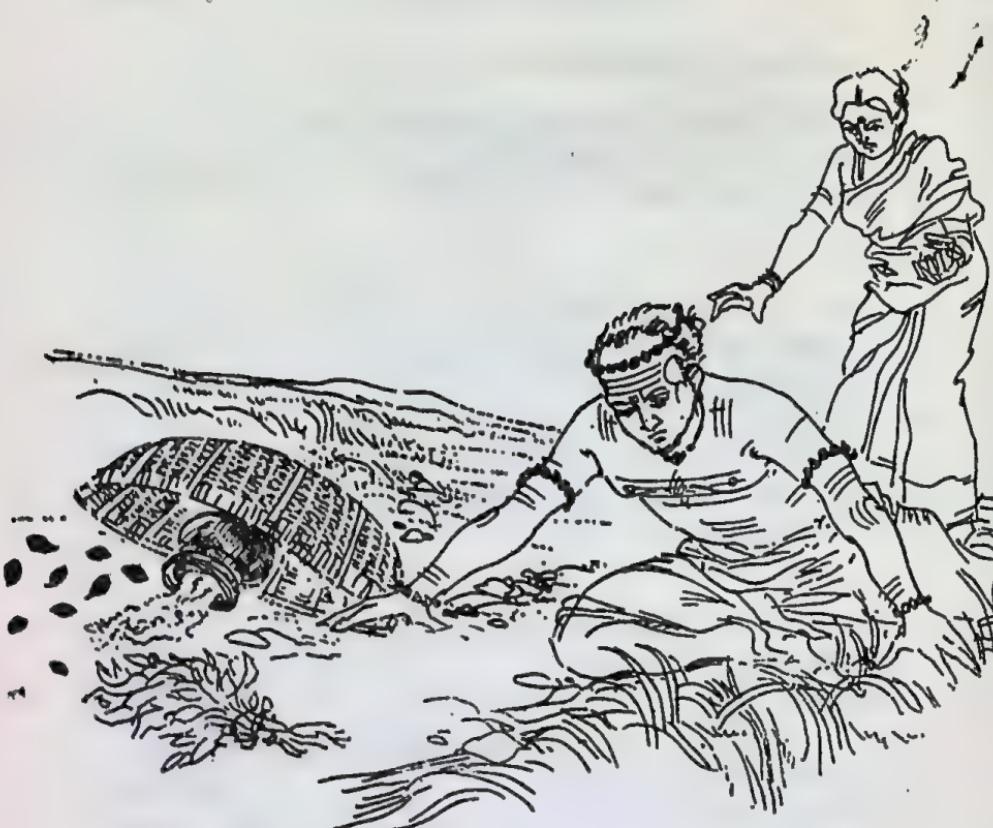
918-19.

* * *

The ringing sound of the falling pickled mangoes and the swaying
 rosy hand of the Dancer on the Hall of Gnosis both rose simulta-
 neously from the fissure in the ground:

When the holy hand reached up
 and caught hold of the hand
 holding the sickle,
 the scar caused by the clutch of his arm
 and the slit caused by the sickle disappeared,
 and he abandoned the horrible deed
 and rejoiced.

*Five articles—milk, curd, ghee, cow's urine, and dung, used for the ceremonial bath of the image in a temple. A collective name for the five articles is Pancha-gavyam.



He pondered over the great gracious mercy
with which his Lord sought him out
and bestowed on him,
and joining his palms in worship,
praised the Lord thus.

921-19.

* * *

“O Lord who
even after seeing my stupidity,
desired my servitude,
and appeared in the fissure on the earth
and dined! Obeisance to you!
O Partner of Her of the slender waist!
O pure excellent Effulgence,
obeisance to You!
O Ancient One of body of coral hue
on which You wear the white ash!
O Lord of plaited matted locks!
obeisance to you!

922-20.

Then there appeared before him the Lord mounted on the bull and said: "Excellent is the deed you have done. Along with your wife of lovely forehead abide eternally in our world!"

Four Velaalars, members of the peasantry, one Brahmana, one Vaisya, one from the warrior caste, and a King, that is to say, representatives of all the people of the land committed what one would call patently atrocious deeds, and the Lord approved the acts and bestowed Mukti on the perpetrators of such deeds. How do these deeds differ from the deeds of persecution and torture performed down the millenniums of history? All the men and women punished by these devotees were people who professed the Caivite Faith and acknowledged Lord Civan as their God. They had violated the rules of the faith to which they had sworn allegiance. A religion, a culture, a way of life does not suffer so much by the enmity of open enemies as by the indifferent, half-hearted, slipshod observance of the codes and practices of that religion by its own members. These internal enemies enjoy all the benefits which accrue by belonging to a particular religion, benefits which faithful adherents have earned and safe-guarded. And still they are like the man who cut the tree's limb which he was straddling. They compass their own ruin and the ruin of the society of which they are members. It is for this reason that God and man approved of the actions of the violent votaries, and Sekkizhaar included their chronicles in his Periya-Puraanam!

13. WORSHIPPING HARAN

"Worship....Haran Himself" bids Clause-3C of the 12th and last aphorism of Civa-gnaana-bhodham. Haran, then is the ultimate goal of worship. There were four servitors of the Lord who gained Mukti by worshipping Haran Himself.



Pughazhththunai-naayanaar was a Brahmana servitor of Seruvi lipuththoor, now known as Arisil-karai-p-puththoor, a village situated at about an hour and a half's walk to the south of Kumbha-konam.

Sekkizhaar relates:

Once during the days
when he was worshipping his Lord
through austerities
and the procedures laid down by the Aagamaas,
famine stalked the world girt by the sea,
and extreme hunger assailed him,
but he swore:
"I would never abandon my King",
and worshipped Him
with many kinds of fragrant flowers
and ablutions with cool water.

4128-2.

* * *

One day when he was bathing Him
who was impossible of being apprehended
by Vishnu or Brahma,
afflicted by extreme hunger,
he lost his balance,
and unable to bear the pot
containing water to the brim
he fell upon the crown of the Lord
with the poison-holding throat
and fainted away.

4129-3.

* * *

By the grace of Lord Sankaran
a sound sleep came over him,
and the Lord of beautiful eyes
thus bestowed His grace in a dream.
"Till the days of scarcity of food pass off,
We shall place for you every day
a coin at this spot."
On the Lord saying so,
our servitor, rid of his trouble, woke up.

4130-4.

* * *

With the Lord who rides the bull
 placing a gold coin at the foot of His dais
 to relieve him of his distress,
 our devotee took it
 and with its help he rejoiced
 along with his hunger-haunted body,
 and
 with full vigour restored to his head,
 his face beamed with joy.

4131-5.

* * *

After he had tided over the period
 of cruel hunger-ridden days
 with the aid of the coin
 which was given every day
 as on the day of his accident,
 he continued to perform service
 as befitted a true slave
 unto the Lord of matted locks
 of lighting sheen
 and finally arrived at the feet
 of the Immaculate One
 with the Devas standing around
 in the Golden Country and adoring Him.

4132-6.

* * *

One may well ask what was the speciality about the act of servitude of this servitor which merited a place in the Periya-puraanam, and, more important still, which merited Mukti. Pugazh th-thunai Naayanaar did not allow the famine and the consequent famished state of his body to stand in the way of his dedicated service unto the Lord. In the Christian Marriage Service, as well as in our own Sanaatana Dharma marriage rites, the wife weds a man swearing fealty in sickness and in health, in poverty and in prosperity—fealty “until death do us part.” The Naayaka-naayaki-bhaavam, the relationship of bride and bridegroom between a human devotee, the Bride, and God the Bridegroom is an eternal marriage of unswerving fealty unto her Lord on the part of the Bride, and unremitting pouring out of grace on the part of the Lord. The Bride’s love is a “more than human love,” and her surrender is “to a God who is more intimate to her than herself.”

This love assigns the devotee, as Khalil Gibran puts it, to Love's sacred fire that he may become sacred bread to God's sacred feast.

It is not the manner of expression of that love, a way of expression which may appear trivial to us, which matters. God looks behind the act into the "more than human love", and confers eternal bliss.

Diverse though the acts of love of the sixty-three saints, supreme and sublime in some cases, trivial or even ludicrous in other cases, uniform in quality and merit was the love behind the acts in every case.

(ii)

Another servitor who worshipped Haran was Neelanakkār, who has been mentioned in two chronicles which have been related earlier in this book. They are the chronicle of Kaaraikkaal-ammaiyaar and other women servitors in a chapter bearing the title, "A Wraith That Walked on Its Head", and the chronicle of Thirugnanasambandhar in the chapter bearing the title, "Son of God". Of him Sekkizhaar records:

In that prosperous ancient town of Saaththamangai
peopled by brahmanas
of outstanding righteous conduct of life,
lived a person who exhibited in his life
the teachings of the Vedas
of great repute in the world;
this devotee was the servitor
of the Lord who carries the poison in His throat;
he went by the name of Neelanakkār. 1831-4.

* * *

He believed that the esoteric teaching of the Vedas
was loving the Lord with the matted locks
bearing the vast waters
and His devotees;
and performing Pooja to their feet;
therefore his object in life was
to lovingly perform these two deeds only. 1832-5

* * *

Accordingly, he spent his life in the routine
of worshipping daily the Author of the Vedas

according to the rites
 prescribed by the Aagamaas
 which disclose the Reality,
 and
 feeding the devotees of the Father
 and
 rendering other services related to these two objectives
 of his life.

1833-6.

* * *

He was assisted in this way of life very loyally by his wife.
 What happened one day when he was giving the ceremonial bath to the Lord with the assistance of his wife is related in another chapter.

* * *

(iii)

Another Servitor whose chronicle has been already dealt with in an earlier chapter is Kunguliya-k-kalaya-naayanar. In one of the two chapters with the title "Worshipping the Temple" we have seen how this servitor spent his life and his life-savings in burning frankincense at the shrines of Lord Civan. Depending on the form their service to Lord Civan and His servitors took, most of the servitors chronicled in the Periya-puraanam never entered the sanctum sanctorum of a temple. Their service, in no way inferior in the eyes of man and God, lay elsewhere, in other avenues of life. One among the few who entered the sanctum sanctorum and worshipped the Lord abiding therein was Kungiliya-k-kalayar. The circumstances of his entering the premises were unique.

The Lingam in the temple at Thirupanandaal had gone out of the vertical position and had leaned over to one side. The King of the country wished to have a Darsan of the Lingam in the proper vertical position. When every effort, including using elephants for the purpose, failed to restore the Lingam to the original position, the King was deeply distressed. Sekkizhaar relates:

Hearing about the distress of the King,
 Kalayanaar of blemishless repute
 for his righteous conduct of life
 liked the King for being bent upon
 having a Darsan of the Lord
 in the vertical position,

and he too come to worship the Lord
with the matted locks of lightning sheen.

854-24

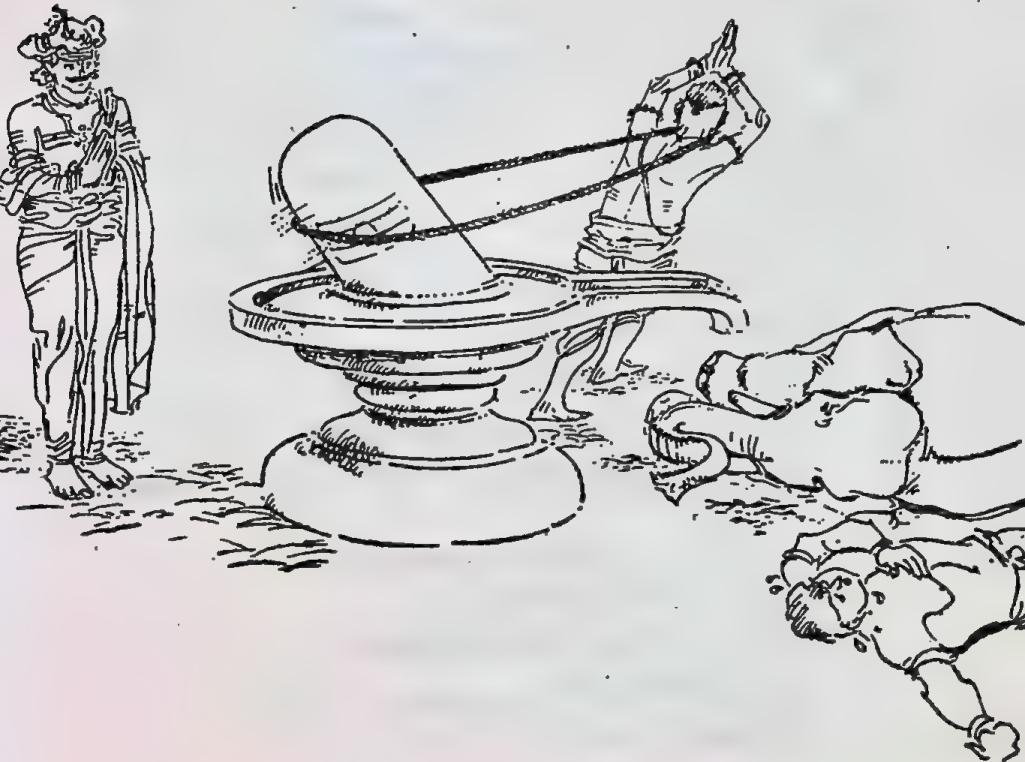
* * *

seeing the distress of the King
and the army lying about on the ground
overcome by weariness
when with all its enthusiastic efforts
the Lingam did not become erect,
Kalayar of great Thavam too
became distressed in mind.

856-26.

* * *

Seeing the army and the team of elephants
lying about wearied and unable to rise,
he said to himself,
“I too should experience this weariness
and weakness,”
and wound round his neck the rope
which had been wound round the sacred body of the Lord .



over paddings placed on His form,
and began to strain at the rope.

857-27.

* * *

Could the Lord stand askew
after the strong-willed devotee
had wound round his neck the rope
twisted out of strands of single-minded love
and had wearied himself
with pulling at such a rope?
The moment the Lord saw
the single-mindedness of Kalayanaar,
He stood erect:
and the Immortals in the sky above
roared with delight.

858-28.

* * *

Such is the strength of spiritual love.

(iv)

Saakkiyar hailed from a Vellaala family of Thiru-ch-changa-mangai, a village near Kaanchipuram, headquarters of the present Chingleput District of Tamilnadu. Saakkiyar was not his original name. When this servitor went to neighbouring Kaanchipuram and became a Buddhist, people began calling him Saakkiyar, which was one of the names of Lord Buddha. But the further he studied his new religion the more he was convinced that the Way of Life of the Caivite Faith was the true one. Sekkizhaar records:

"The deed, the doer, the fruits of the deed,
and He who brings them home to the doer—
four are the conclusive factors
arrived at by true means;
this nature none but the Caivite Faith has";
thus he concluded
and, by virtue of redeeming Thavam,
he realised by the grace of God
that what matters is Civan.

3640-5.

* * *

"No matter in whatever manner one lives,
whatever garb one wears,
what matters is never to forget
the feet of Sankaran of abiding glory"
Thus concluded he,
and, holding thus, did not discard
the garb he wore,

but with aid of welling love
he stood steadfast in unforgetfulness of Civan,
the Immaculate.

3641-6.

* * *

Becoming clear in his mind
that it was the Civa-lingam,
the original concept of the Formless
and Form-endowed,
and the symbol for the Lord wearing the long snake
who appeared as the far-reaching Pillar of Fire
right in the sight of Vishnu and Brahma
who were searching for the Lord everywhere
without a sense of shame,

3643-8.

* * *

Saakkiyaar, desirous of daily taking his food
only after a Darsan of a Civalingam,
saw a Civa-linga in an open space nearby.



His mind in a state of high ecstatic bliss,
he did not know what he was doing;
he saw a stone lying nearby,
took it with excited feelings,
and flung it at the Lingam.

3644-9.

* * *

It is said that the Tibetan peasant when he sets out on his morning's chores took up a small stone lying around and flung it on to a heap of similarly flung stones, accompanying the act with a muttered prayer to the gods to ensure his welfare in the course of the day. In the barren hilly terrain devoid of any plant life, the stone was the Tibetan's floral offering to his God. Often large cairns grew up at a spot as a result of this strange floral offering.

The next day, Saakkiyar, who passed the same way as on the previous day, remembered his act of the previous day when he came before the Lingam and concluded that it was only by the divine will that he had acted as he did. Therefore he continued this unique form of worship every day. Sekkizhaar relates:

This routine with zest he unfailingly did.
If we were to say what this act of the devotee
turned out to be, it was this—
an act born of pure and abiding love
is to the Pure One a worship of the highest order
according to the Law of Love.

8648-13.

* * *

If we research into how flinging a stone
became an act of love,
did not a slap with a shoe
by a hunter wielding a bow
smack on the Lord's sacred head
become an act of love?
The act of our good man
motivated by love,
foreigners to love will call it a fling by a stone;
to Haran a flower it will be.

3649-14.

* * *

One day, he who had by oversight sat down to eat got up
exclaiming, "Alas, I have forgotten to fling a stone at my Lord,"
and rushed up and arrived before the Lord who clad Himself in a

hide of a raging elephant. When, abandoning eating his food, he was in the act of running, with fear and longing, to fling the stone, Lord Civan, accompanied by His Consort appeared in the sky before our servitor with the intention of conferring on him His mercy. When the devotee fell at His feet, the Lord conferred on him the honour of being with Him in the company of former devotees, and left.

St. Manikkavachakar too has immortalised this deed in his Thiruvaachakam. He sings:

What is the story behind the gracious bestowal
of the godly disc
which slit the body of the stormy petrel
of a Salandharan
on goodly Naaraayanan on that day?
Note that on fortunate Naaraayanan
gouging out his eye
and placing it as a flower at the feet of Haran,
He bestowed the disc on him.

* * *

14. AN EYE FOR AN EYE

(Clause 3c of 12th Soothram of Civagnaanabodham)

Worship Haran Himself

"Servitor to the noble devotee Kannappan
skilled in the arts, am I, Aarooran!"

—*Sundarar*

"Seeing the blood streaming from the benevolent eye
on the sacred face of the Lord of holy Kaalatti,
an Ornament on earth,
and sore distressed in heart, they say,
our Kannappan, a hunter by caste,
gouged out with deadly dart
his flower-like right eye
and applied it (on the wounded eye)."

—*Nambi-andaar-nambi*

and

A tooth for a tooth,
An eye for an eye,
was the law of ancient Israel.

There was a saint in Tamilnaadu who followed a law with a similar wording. But the similarity did not extend beyond the words of the law. It ended there. In the former case, the law was a vengeful law, a terrible law of retribution, an ancient law, perhaps in tune with the times, a law which, however, the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ, Son of Man, and the Son of God, the All-merciful, found necessary to abrogate, found necessary to replace with a totally different law, a law based on the chivalry of meekness, a law which echoed the maxim laid down thirty years before him in a far distant land by Thiruvalluvar who decreed:

To do good in return and put them to shame
is the way to punish those who did you harm.

In the case of the saint who tops the list of those who were senior, in point of time, to Sambandhar, the law of "an eye for an eye" meant, if your neighbour or friend or beloved had a diseased

eye, offer your eye in replacement, not as they do these days after you are dead, but when you are alive and in the vigour of your youth, scarcely past sixteen years. To call this merely an act of love will be like calling Mount Everest a crag. It was not a mere act of love but an act of charity, the highest and most divine form of love, a charity which partakes of the quality of the Avyyaajakaruna, the spontaneous flow of grace of God which does not need any justification for its exhibition. Charity, whose Tamil equivalent is '*arul*', is exercised only by God and saints who are gods who walk on earth. The saints who preceded Sambandhar in point of time, who, we may say, blazed the trail, who cut and hewed the Pathway to God through more inimical territory than man was ever called upon later to break through, who rendered the Path smooth and safe for others to follow, those saints, to the best of our knowledge, were nine in number.

It is true that we cannot fix the dates of 29 of the saints in the Periya-puraanam; it is possible that some or many of them may have lived before Sambandhar. But we have to go on recorded history and not on surmises. Therefore, for the purposes of this book, the saints before Sambandhar will be nine. They are, in English alphabetical order:

1. Amarneethinayanar,
2. Kaaraikkaal-ammaiyar,
3. Kanampullar,
- .4. Kannappar,
5. Kochechengkat-cola-nayanar,
6. Moolar,
7. Naminandhi-atikal,
8. Saakkiyar,
9. Sandeswarar.

It is generally held that among these nine, Kannappar is the seniormost in point of time. Anthropologically too, he will top the list. Tamil scholars have divided land into four major regions. They are: (1) Mountains and mountainous country (2) Foothills of the mountains and afforested territory, (3) Cultivated fertile riverine terrain, the plains, and (4) the Sea-coast regions. A fifth is sometimes spoken of, but it has no distinctive territory of its own. It is the drought-stricken barren land which can be and is found

in all the other four regions. It is a changing phenomenon. Man, in his march to civilization, has been first a nomad and a hunter, then a settler, though still a nomad in areas cleared in forests by felling trees and by burning shrubs, then a permanent settler in villages and towns, a farmer or a merchant, a man with a vested interest, and lastly, a pioneer who crossed the seas and carried the seeds of civilization to other lands. Kannappar was a mountain-dweller and a hunter.

It will but strain belief if we claim that Kannappar, in point of time, was the earliest of the sixty-three saints included in the Periya-puraanam. Kannappar was, in all probability, an aborgine of Tamilnaadu, a member of a hill tribe, a Bhil or a Gond. He is the only one among the sixty-three who represents the aborigines of Tamilnaadu.

Kannappar was not only the seniormost of all the saints in point of time, but he was also the greatest of them in the nature of the sacrifice made out of love of the Lord. It is true that saints should not be compared and contrasted, weighed and assessed. Thomas-a-Kempis admonishes us thus in this connection.

"I advise thee not to inquire nor dispute of the merits of holy men, as to which of them is holier than the other, or which shall be greater in the Kingdom of Heaven."

But as there is an occasion for self-boasting (Nannool, the Tamil Grammar, lays down the rule about this), so also there is an occasion for comparison of saints in all humility. This is such an occasion. Many among the saints attempted to take their own lives when they failed to keep a vow or a promise, one even allowed himself to be killed rather than kill his opponent when he saw on the body of that opponent in a sword duel the insignia of a devotee of Civan, such as marks of the sacred ash etc. But no one did or was called upon to do what Kannappar did for love of the Lord. More of this later. It is for this reason that Manikkavachakar sang:

Even after finding (in me)
a lack of love similar to Kannappan's.
my Sire, by my own measure,
me too graciously enslaved.

This shows that God Himself did not set up a general standard against which he weighed and judged the acts of love of His devotees. He did not enquire into the nature of the act manifesting the love, but he looked inside into the heart and accepted the act, however trifling it may be in the eyes of the world, for the sake of the intense love behind the act, a love which was in no way inferior to the love of any other devotee. It was thus that Jesus accepted the widow's mite.

Not only Manikkavachakar, at the earliest end of our era had sung of the greatness of Kannappar's love of God, but Rama-linga-swaamikal has also sung thus about him in the 19th century,

Accepting with pleasure
the slap by the sandals given by Thinnappar
in order to remove the flowers of variegated colours,
and, on his solicitously offering a good meat
of tested sweet taste, eating it,
our God,
when He found him about to transplant his other eye too,
cried: "Kannappaa, stop!"
and caught hold of his hand.

* * *

Sambandhar, Pattinatthaar, Sundarar, Thirunavukkarasar, all have sung about him, the only one of the saints to whom such universal homage has been paid:

The eleventh Thirumurai has poems in his praise by two poets. Nakkeera-deva-naayanaar, not to be confused with the Nakkeerar of Thirumurukaattruppadi fame, has sung a poem styled: 'Thirukkannappa-t-thevar-thirumarram'. The other poet is Kallaada-theva-naayanaar who has sung another poem with the same title. Nakkeera-theva-uaaya-naar sings:

His birth was in a family of hunters
that robbed honeycombs and ate flesh;
he roamed about in a forest
among the mountains where roared the fierce tiger;
he bred red-eyed dogs and decoy animals;
he wielded the cruel bow, the spear, the sword,
and countless other weapons besides;
he dwelt with store of butchered carcass of animals,
several pots filled with fermenting honey,

and blood-stained weapons for company
in a hut with a frame work of the self-same weapons
and roofed over with grass and peacock plumes
and whose open spaces where the straw had come unstuck
was covered with the pelt of a young tiger.

Even if the quarry had gone into hiding,
night and day, with untiring zeal,
to set cruel dogs on it
and with arrow in bow and dagger in hand
and the help of his several relatives
kill it, while it squirmed in the throes of death,
was his living.
His form—a brawny forearm
chewed by a fierce tiger,
a rock-like chest hacked by mighty weapons,
a face marked by the teeth of bears,
a thigh slashed by the sharp-tusked boar,
dense upstanding tuft,
blood-shot terrifying eyes,
resounding harsh speech!

* * *

Such was the man, a brutish creature born of brutish parentage in
brutish terrain.

Kallaada-theva-naayanaar also paints a similar picture, though
in softer tones. Sekkizhaar, singing of the environment and parentage of Kannappar, paints no less a harsh picture. He sings:

There in Uduppoor lived the hillfolk.
Nets made of thongs of raw hide
hung on the boughs of wood-apple trees
to the huge trunks of which were tied
clamouring hounds with hanging ears.
Besides boar and tiger, bear and stags,
mountain-rice too basked everywhere
on the rocks.

652-3.

* * *

In every group
of well-armed, fearsome-eyed, hunters of harsh speech,
besides the clamorous sounds
of 'kill', 'fling', 'stab'.
rose the sound of hour-glass shaped drums

with small pebbles inside them,
 blare of horns,
 and throb of small-faced drums,
 Above all this pandemonium,
 rose the roar of mountain stream
 with a music of its own.

654-5

* * *

Besides the herds of cattle of various breeds
 which the way-laying hunters
 had seized from the neighbourhood,
 there roamed everywhere
 herds of rutting elephants raising an uproar
 which competed with the thunderous-voiced clouds
 high above in the sky.

655-6

* * *

With the ruthless hunters
 of ebony-black body,
 fear and mercy never sought refuge.
 Rough hide was their dress,
 To these poison-tipped fiery arrows-wielding hunters
 who fed on mountain-honey
 and meat cooked with rice,
 Naagan was chief.

* * *

Though by the blessing of God,
 he had performed Thavam in a former life,
 yet, through influence of present birth,
 he topped everyone in cruelty!

657-8

* * *

In such an environment and parentage was born Kannappar,
 christened as Thinnappan, the strong-willed one, in his childhood.
 If, by lineage and environment, he would not be chosen for the
 halo of sainthood, his training too was not one which would have
 qualified him for that honour. His pastime was to

chase and catch the young of speedy hares,
 wild boars, cubs of the striped tiger,
 and pups of the prairie dogs of drooping ears,
 and train them as pets.

675-26.

As regards the arts, he was taught no other than how to wield the bow and the dagger. Of letters, he had not caught even a whiff of its fragrance. Thus he reached his sixteenth year when his father, the chieftain of the clan of hunters, retired in his favour and made him the chief of the clan and handed over to him the insignia of office, the dagger and the robe of animal hide.

With due ceremony and pomp and noise, Thinnappan set out on his ceremonial maiden-hunt accompanied by his retinue of hunters and hounds. On and on they sped till Thinnappan outstripped them in the chase of a crafty boar, and was left with but two companions. At last, he killed the boar with his dagger in single combat. His mates said to him: "Sire, we have travelled leagues chasing this boar, now hunger is gnawing our entrails. Let us roast this boar and eat it, and, quenching our thirst thereafter, let us slowly return to our hunting ground."

Lord Civan, ever an adept at trapping his devotees, even as Thinnappan was at trapping his game, had laid a wily trap to draw Thinnaappan to his lair—the shrine atop the Kaalatthi Hills. It would seem that the boar was a favourite with Civan. Once competing in the chase of a boar, He had an altercation with Arjuna over the claim to the kill, and the Paandava, in exasperation, clouted Him over the head with the bow. On another occasion, He found a litter of wailing piglets by the side of a dead sow whose body was still warm, and, moved by compassion, He entered the carcase of the sow and suckled the piglets. Now it was a boar which He used to decoy Thinnappan to His shrine.

In answer to the suggestion of his henchman, Thinnappan angrily retorted: "Where on earth can we find water in this forest?" His companion, Nannan, mentioned a stream nearby, and Thinnappan bade his servants to bring along the carcass, and strode towards the stream. Reaching it, he saw a range of hills nearby and said to Nannan: "Let us go up the hill". And he replied: "If you go up there, you will meet only good sights, moreover, there abides the 'Kudumi-thevar', the god who eradicates all foibles. We may even worship Him."

A remarkable change came over Thinnappan. He exclaimed: "What is the matter with me? As I near the mountain range, I

feel as if a burden has been lifted off my shoulders! Where does the god abide on that hill? Come, let us go." And so they went up the hill. There he saw the Unique One,

Who abode as a shoot*
of the sky-scraping Kaalatti Mountain.
with resulting rapturous love's impetus pushing him,
he ran forward as if enamoured of the Lord,
embrac'd Him
and kissed Him on the crown of His head!

754-105

* * *

Unconscious of the dropping of the bow from his hand,
the youth wondered aloud: "Who could have plucked
and strewn these leaves and flowers on Him?
Who could have poured this water on Him?
who could have adored the Lord thus?"
Nannan who stood by, said: "I know this."
and related how
when once he had accompanied Thinnappan's father
to this shrine, he had seen a Brahmana do this. 757-108

* * *

He added that the same Brahmana had, perhaps, done this now as well. Thinnappan made a mental note to do the same, thinking that these acts were, probably, pleasing to the Lord at Kaalaththi Hill. He became concerned for the loneliness in which Kaalaththinaathar abode. And there is no one, he mused, to serve Him meat for food. He wanted to do this, but his mind was unwilling to leave Him alone.

He will come back, go away again,
embrace Him, again go away,
will keep looking at Him with welling love,
like a cow abandoning its calf;
would say: "Oh Lord!
I myself shall carefully choose
and bring good tender meat for Your dinner." 761-112.

* * *

*Shoot of the....mountain—the icon, the Lingam, on the thill was not a man-made, a man-installed one, but a spontaneous growth from the hill. Such Lingams are called Swayambhu-lingams.

Saying: "Who will keep You company here?
 No, I will not go.
 But I cannot stay here
 while you are hungry!".
 tears streamed from his eyes,
 At last, however, he took courage to go,
 and, taking up his bow,
 he worshipped the Lord with his hands
 and left.

762-113

* * *

His other companions had, in the meantime, prepared a fire by the side of the stream. They roasted the boar on the fire. Thinnappan, testing the pieces of meat with his teeth for tenderness, collected the best of them in a Drona.*

The departure of his woodmen he did not notice,
 quickly he placed the meat in the Drona;
 with intent to bathe the Lord,
 the river water he took in his mouth,
 plucked fragrant fresh flowers,
 and stuck them amidst his tuft of hair.

770-121

* * *

Carrying his bow and arrows in one hand,
 and, in the other, carrying the drona
 of fresh tender meat,
 anxious that "my Lord will now be very hungry",
 he sped and neared the hill.

771-122

* * *

Saying to himself:
 "By this time my Lord must be famished,"
 he raced up the hill,
 and, coming up to the Lord sprouting from the hill,
 he brushed aside the flowers on His head
 with his shoes,
 and spat on the crown of the head
 of the immaculate One
 the water he had brought in his mouth for the bath,
 as if he was spitting the love welling up in him.

772-123

* * *

*Drona—a cup-like vessel made out of leaves.



Thinnanaar of the expert hand resting on his bow
 bowed low over the (head of the) Lord
 on great Kaalatthi Hill
 and adorned it
 with the flowers which he carried on his head,
 set before Him,
 the consecrated meat in the Drona
 of stitched-together leaves
 and said:

773-124

* * *

“This meat is very excellent,
 I have myself chosen fat pieces of meat
 and, stringing them on the skewer,
 have roasted them to a nice turn over the fire,
 and, moreover, I have tested them with my teeth
 and have tasted them with my experienced tongue.
 Do graciously eat it.”

774-125

Lord Civan must have actually eaten the meat offered in this unique manner even as the Pollaa-p-pillaiyaar, Ganapathi, of Naaraaiyoor, ate the offerings made by the unsophisticated lad, Nambi-andaaranambi.

The sun set for the day. As dusk crowded in, Thinnappan, fearing that night-prowling cruel beasts might intrude on the Lord, and, cherishing in his heart a perfect love, which, in the words of Kahlil Gibran, had "no other desire but to fulfil itself," stood guard, like another black crag, all the night long, bearing the bow in his hand, and did not leave the side of the Lord.

This went on for five days. The Brahmana priest was shocked to see the imprint of shoes and pug-marks of dogs, and the strange flowers atop the head of the Lord. He swept the floor clean of the polluting marks, and, after due purificatory rites, worshipped the Lord in his traditional fashion. But he lost patience on the fifth day and railed and stormed against the unknown person defiling the shrine and prayed to the Lord to put a stop to this evil. The Lord appeared that night in a dream before the Brahmana and said:

"His very frame is an embodiment
of love unto Us,
His consciousness is nothing but
all his acts are pleasurable to Us,
thuswise do you discover his state:

806-157

If you would hide yourself here
that We may show you his deeds,
then you will see all the ways
of the love he bears Me;
forget your worries!"

812-163

And so indeed did the priest hide himself the next day behind the lingam, the Lord's amorphous image. And Thinnappan, as was his routine for the last five days, came on the sixth day as well to do Pooja according to his lights. He came hurrying up and, as he approached the sanctum sanctorum, he saw a sight that froze his very blood. Let Sekkizhaar tell the tale:

The noble Lord of Thirukkaalatthi,
desirous of showing to the Brahmana
the solicitude of Thinnappan,
let a stream of blood,
spurt out of one of His eyes.
Seeing this from afar,
the wielder of the beautiful cruel bow
came running up in haste.

818-169.

* * *

The blood he saw and fainted,
the goodly water in his mouth spurted out,
the bow and leaf-bowl of meat fell to the ground,
the bunch of flowers stuck in his tuft dropped down,
and the lad with a garland
of green leaves on his chest
fell shuddering to the ground.

819-170

* * *

He rose as fast as he fell,
rushed forward,
wiped the blood,
saw not any stoppage of the flow,
knew not what to do,
sighed and fainted again,
revived,
wondered who could have done this,
rose up, looked on all sides, took up the bow. 820-171

* * *

He strung an arrow to the bow, ran down the hill looking for the enemy, man or beast, found none, came back, fell down, and hugging to his chest the feet of the Lord, he wailed and rained a flood of tears. He rose up and went in search of herbs he had seen hunters use to heal arrow-wounds. He brought them and crushing the juice thereof, he poured the same into the bleeding eye, but in vain.

What next to do, he pondered, and remembered the adage, "flesh for flesh will cure an ill of the flesh." Forthwith he gouged out one of his eyes with the tip of an arrow and applied it on the bleeding eye of the Primordial Lord.

The staunched bleeding he saw,
 he jumped from the ground in glee,
 slapped his rock-like shoulders, danced,
 "Good indeed is this idea of mine", he chortled.
 With intensity of joy he became like one turned insane.

823-174

* * *

The Lord, with intent to further show
 the merit of the magnanimous one
 who applied his eye to the holy right eye,
 made an unceasing flow of crimson blood
 spurt from the other eye.
 And this saw he who was begot by great Thavam—
 the scion of the clan of hunters,
 superior to the heavenly ones
 in his principles.

824-175

* * *

He saw and cried: "I am ruined!
 On ceasing of bleeding from one eye,
 blood gushes forth from the other eye!
 but I won't be frightened by this,
 I have the remedy in hand.
 One more eye have I,
 that I shall gouge out
 and apply, and put and end to this."

825-176

* * *

He wondered how to see
 after he had gouged out the remaining eye
 to apply it on the eye of the Lord
 who had an eye on the forehead;
 so he placed his left foot
 on our Lord's holy eye,
 and, with intense love,
 took up a perfect arrow
 and put it to his eye.
 Even as he did so,
 endure it no longer could Deva-devan,

826-177

* * *

the Rider on the bull with blood-shot eyes,
 the gracious-eyed Lord
 who assumed lordship over Thinnappar,



the Marvel on sacred Kaalatti.
 While His holy hand restrained
 the hand which was about to gouge the eye
 with an arrow,
 the nectarine voice of the Lord
 with snakes for armlets
 thrice cried:
 Stop, Kannappa!

827-178

* * *

From that day, Thinnappan became Kannappan.

Words have lost their worth through misuse and overuse.
 But I mean what I say when I assert that nowhere in the hagiography
 of Sekkizhaar, or, for that matter, nowhere in the hagiography of
 the world has any devotee been called upon to make the kind of

sacrifice that Thinnappan made, nor did anyone offer to make such a sacrifice, much less made such a sacrifice.

It may be argued that Vishnu, long before Kannappan, had sacrificed one of his eyes. St. Appar immortalises this event in one of his songs.

He sings:

While Vishnu,
smearing himself liberally with the sacred ash,
was worshipping Lord Civan daily
with one thousand lotus flowers,
one day he found himself short of one flower,
and made up the shortage with one of his eyes;
for that act of ardour
the Lord bestowed on him the discus.
The same Lord of conflicting deeds
bestows His grace on Humanity
while seated at Veezhimizhalai
in the temple
which Vishnu brought down there from heaven
in gratitude for Lord Civan bestowing on him the discus.

—Thirunavukkarasar IV-64

Sr. Manikkavaachakar too has immortalised this deed in his Thiruvachakam. He sings:

What is the story behind the gracious bestowal
of the godly disc
which slit the body of the stormy petrel
of a Salandharan—
on goodly Naaraayanan on that day?
Note that on fortunate Naaraayanan
gouging out his eye
and placing it as a flower at the feet of Haran
He bestowed the disc on him.

But this act of Vishnu pales before the sacrifice of Kannappan as Vishnu's act was not born of unselfish compassion, was not born as a result of the compelling feeling of empathy. Moreover his action savours of an act of quid pro quo, for he was rewarded for his act. In fact, he asked for the discus as proved by the following song of St. Sundaramoorthy Swaamikal who sings:

On Hari (Vishnu) asking that day
 for the lethal disc,
 You, O Lord Civan, graciously bestowed it on him.
 Therefore Vishnu's act can never rank with the act of
 sacrifice of Kannappan.

True, a hunter even like Kannappan made an extra-ordinary sacrifice long long ago. A Brahmana Guru, preceptor to the Pandavas, in order to appease the envy of his royal disciples, asked of a low-born hunter, who had presumed to mentally adopt that preceptor as his Guru, his right thumb as a fee. And he gave it. He was probably handicapped for sometime thereafter, but, perhaps, he learnt, later, to use his left hand. But here, a hunter volunteered to give up both his eyes. A dweller in wild terrain, among wilder men, and wildest beasts, he would not have lived to see another day. Yet he gladly offered his eyes without the least hesitation. So supreme was his love for the Lord, a love which Manikkavaachakar called unparalleled love. Unparalleled then it was in the dawn of this era and unparalleled it is still, and unparalleled it will be for ever.

It is, therefore, no wonder that Pattinatthaar sang:

With the cleaver,
 my child, butcher I cannot,
 and feed You;
 abide by the defiance, flung by a dame,
 and waste my youth I cannot;
 doing service
 for (no more than) six days,
 gouge my eye and apply it I cannot;
 how, indeed, am I to become a slave
 unto the Father in Kaalatti?

* * *

15. A WRAITH THAT WALKED ON ITS HEAD

(Clause 3C of 12th Soothram of Civagnaanabhodham)

Worship Haran Himself

“Servitor am I to.....and Peyaar as well”

—Sundarar

“She, who, saying: “I will not tread with my feet
the sacred mountain of our Lord”,
walked on her head with both her feet pointed above,
she who was privileged to be hailed, “My Mother”
by the Lord of red golden body
when Uma laughed at the sight,
she is the treasure of the family in Kaaraikkaal
where pure honey seeps from the boughs of trees.

—Nambi-aandaar-nambi

There was a comely young girl who was the only daughter of a very rich merchant in Karaikkal, which even after the independence of India was a French Settlement in India for some time. Like many rich fathers of an only daughter, the rich merchant was not willing to part with her, the apple of his eye, and, therefore, persuaded his son-in-law to leave his own town and his parent's home and settle down in Karaikkal itself. Many a daughter, in such circumstances, would have turned out to be not so ideal a wife, but our girl who was christened at birth as Punithavathi, but was later reverently hailed by no less a person than Lord Civan Himself as “Ammaiye”—‘O Mother Mine’! and not so reverently referred to by Sundarar in his poem by the single word “Peyaar” (Ghost), unadorned by any adjectives, was an exception. She was full of all the house-wifely virtues which Thiru-valluvar ascribes to a wife in his Thirukkural. Thus he defines the ideal wife:

An ideal Life's helpmate is she
who has the requisite accomplishments
to run a household,
and runs it within her husband's income.

A wife is she
 who guards her virtue,
 lovingly serves him who espoused her,
 cherishes the good name of both of them,
 and is untiring in discharging these duties.
 and one may add:
 Along with her husband,
 guests having tended.
 She is on the lookout for more.

56

Sekkizhaar describes her thus:

Our lady of silken tresses,
 who settled down to a wifely life
 as excellent mate to him, her husband,
 even while welling ardent love unto the sacred feet
 of the Lord with the rampant bull
 vastly increased unceasingly (in her heart),
 performed the traditionally handed down household duties
 without failing in the noble quality of a wife. 1740-14

If devotees of our Lord came,
 she served them good unpolluted food,
 and, moreover, according to their desert,
 she gave gold and gems and good clothes,
 whichever they needed.

While she continued to live like this
 with increasing fervour
 to the sacred feet of the Lord of the heaven-dwellers,
 one day, 1741-15

her husband sent from his shop two mangoes with instructions to keep them for his dinner.

But before he could come, a devotee came and she, as was her custom, respectfully invited him to partake of food in her house. But, as the vegetable curry was not yet ready, it occurred to her that the mango would be a suitable side-dish for the devotee and, accordingly, served him one of the two, which he ate with relish and went his way. In due course, the husband came and sat for his dinner. When he was taking his food, she brought the remaining mango and served it to him. The fruit was so delicious that he asked her to serve him the other one too! She left the place as if she was going to fetch it. Let Sekkizhaar take up the story:

Standing aside there,
 she gave way to despair,
 What could she do for the delicious fruit?
 She became lost in thought,
 but the moment she recollect ed in her mind
 the feet of the Lord astride the bull
 who helps one in distress,
 in her hand reposed
 an extraordinarily sweet fruit.

1741-25.

* * *

On her bringing it along
 and serving it with joy,
 he ate it.
 And finding that its taste was greater than nectar,
 he said:
 "This is not like the fruit you served before,"
 and asked of the bangled dame:
 "As this is unobtainable in all the three worlds,
 where else did you get it from?"

1742-26.

* * *

On hearing those words,
 the lady would not reply,
 thinking that the Merciful One's
 remarkable great grace
 was something that should not be revealed.
 At the same time,
 on account of the wisely virtuous life that she led,
 she thought that not to respect the husband's query
 was not correct behaviour,
 and was in a dilemma.

1743-27.

* * *

"To say as it happened is my duty,"
 said to herself the high principled lady,
 worshipped in her mind the feet
 of the Lord with the dusky throat,
 and to the husband who asked:
 "Who gave the fruit which I have now received?"
 the lady of sweet-smelling soft tresses told
 exactly as it happened.

1744-28.

When the husband heard that it was by God's grace, he would not believe it, and said: "If it is so, get me another by His grace." Thereupon,

The wife went aside
and, after praying in her mind,
said to the Lord adorned with snakes:
"If you would, not graciously give this to me,
here and now,
my words would turn false."
Lo, forthwith, a mango fruit materialised
in her hand by the grace of God,
On her giving it into the hands of her husband,
he received it with amazement,

1746-30.

* * *

Forthwith, the merchant could not see
the fruit which had come into his hand.
Overcome with unallayable fear and his mind in a whirl,
he thought the lady of bejewelled tresses
was some strange goddess,
and, deciding to leave her,
did not tell any one about it,
but lived apart without relationship with her. 1747-31.

* * *

Very soon, he equipped a ship for a mercantile expedition and departed from Karaikkal to a country he had in mind. There he prospered exceedingly well, but soon sailed again and settled down in a sea-coast town in Paandinaadu where he prospered, and, in course of time, he married the daughter of a local merchant and had a daughter by her whom he named "Punithavathi" in memory of his godly wife.

Words reached the father of our lady that her husband was living thus in a town in Paandinaadu, and he, forthwith, collected some of his relatives and took her down to that town with the intention of confronting his son-in-law with his wronged wife. Arrived there, he sent word to the young man about his arrival. Sekkizhaar relates:

On hearing words of their arrival, the merchant
grew frightened in his mind,

and saying to himself,
 "I shall forestall them,
 taking with me the charming wife
 I have since married
 and the girl-child she has borne me,"
 he went up before the lady of lovely tresses. 1760-44

* * *

There, along with that wife and the toddler,
 he bowed to the feet of the doe-like wife,
 who had risen to her feet (on his arrival),

and saying:

"I am leading my life here by your grace only,
 and, on that account, this little child bears your name,"
 he fell prostrate before her. 1761-45

* * *

To the astounded relatives of his former wife who angrily asked him: "What do you mean by worshipping your wife?" he replied:

She, here, is not a human being:
 after I learnt of her being a very great god
 I left her, and
 I have named after her this child
 which I later begot;
 that was why I fell at her golden feet;
 do you too similarly worship her." 1763-47

* * *

The lady of fragrant tresses, on hearing the words of the merchant, paid obeisance to the anklet resounding feet of the Lord with matted locks adorned by Kondrai flowers, and said with a heart surcharged with emotion:

"Ha! This is the point of view this man has in mind!
 In that case, this mass of beauty-laden flesh,
 which I endured for this man's sake,
 I should discard here,
 and I should get an appropriate wraith's form
 with which I may pay obeisance
 to your feet there,"

Saying so, she stood meditating on the feet
of the transcendent One.

1765-44.

* * *

That very moment,
by the grace of the Dancer on the Hall (in Thillai),
experience of the Lofty Way surged up in her
and she gained what she craved for.
She shed all the beauty inhering in the flesh of her body
and, with her body reduced to a skeleton,
she became a wraith,
worshipped by the earth and the heavens. 1766-50

Karaikkaal-ammaiyaar herself describes her apparitional appearance thus:

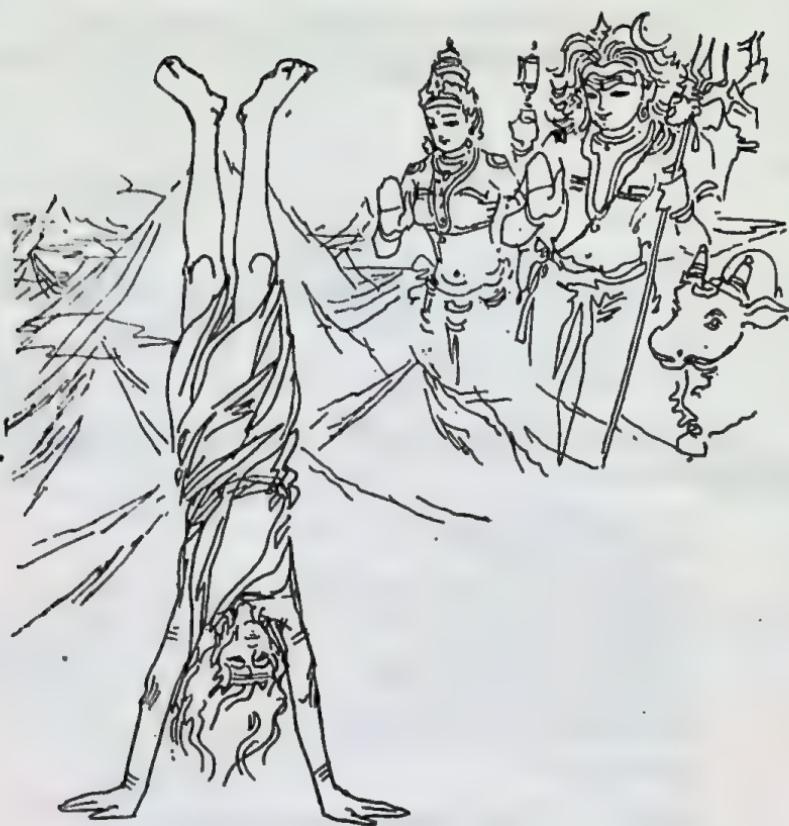
Thiruvaalangkaadu is the place
where our Father,
with His matted locks aswinging
in all the eight directions,
dances the fire-dance
to the delight of His limbs
in the hot cremation ground
where a female wraith of shrivelled breasts,
swollen veins,
protruding eye-balls,
white teeth, sunken stomach, fiery red hair,
two protruding fangs,
arched insteps and long shanks
was staying and shrieking.

* * *

She was filled with an overpowering desire to go to the Kailaas Mountain, the abode of Civan.

Crossing all the northern countries
with a speed faster than the mind's,
she neared the dazzling Kailaas Mount
where abides the Lord
wearing a garland of Kondrai flowers
and wielding a trident in His hand;
there she gave up walking on her feet,
and ascended the mountain walking on her head. 1771-55

* * *



Uma, the Spouse of Civan, saw this apparition and, in amazement, exclaimed to her Lord:

“Oh my Lord!
Amazing is the love of the bony frame
which is coming up here
walking on its head!”

* * *

He replied:

“Note! She who is coming up
is a mother who cherishes Us;
and this glorious form
she prayed for and obtained.”
Then, as she came near,
looking at her,
He graciously uttered the momentous unique word,

"Oh My Mother!"*
that the world may be redeemed. 1774-58

* * *

Looking at her—

who, saying in response "Oh Father!"
when the Lord of benevolent eyes
graciously called her "Oh Mother!"
bowed down and fell at His lotus like golden red feet
and stood up—
the Lord adorned with white conch-shell ear-rings
asked, "What do you want of Us here?"
On Him asking thus,
she paid obeissance to Him,
and proceeded to answer Him.

1775.

* * *

After she had prayed for
undying blissful love unto Him,
she further prayed:
"Not being born again, I want;
but, if there is birth again,
the boon of never forgetting you, I want;
moreover, Oh Righteousness Incarnate,
I pray that I should rejoicingly sing about You,
and, when You dance,
I should stand at Your feet!"

1776-60

* * *

And He graciously commanded her to go to the ancient town of Aalangkaadu and witness His great dance, and, ever filled with bliss, sing His praises. Even so, she walked back to Aalangkaadu and there abode and sang in several poems the praises of the Lord.

There has been no one else among the devotees of Civan who reached the Kailaas Mountain and came back. It is true that Sundarar rode to Kailaas on an elephant and his friend Chera-maan-perumaal-nayanar rode up there on a horse, but they never

*This is the only occasion when the Lord, of whom Manikka-vaachakar said: "Mother he has none, nor father has He," addressed anyone as Mother.

came back. Thirunaavukkarasar attempted to ascend the Kailaas Mountain creeping on his chest, afraid to place his foot on such a sacred place, but he was stopped half-way by the Lord who came in the guise of a sage, and told him that no human being has ever come or can come to Kailaas Mountain, and therefore, bade him go back. But to Karaikkaal-ammaiyaar, it was given not only to reach the presence of the Lord on Kailaas Mountain, but also to be called, "Oh Mother!". Not only that, It was her great privilege to return to the human world after this unique experience and live long, even though as a wraith, and sing the praises of the Lord.

Karaikkaal-ammaiyaar was an ideal wife, an ideal devotee of God. Love of the Lord was her equipment, love was her craving, love was her life, and love was her boon.

(ii)

Dr. E.B. Nash, a great homeopath, writing his Introduction to his book, "Leaders in Homeopathic Therapeutics" said:

"I do not propose to adopt the usual way of beginning with 'Aconite' and ending with 'Zincum', but to follow the bent of my inclinations, or, as it is sometimes expressed, the "moving of the spirit." I too propose to follow the "moving of the spirit" and deal in this chapter with all the women saints who have been given a place in the Periya-puraanam and also with those who should have been given a place there.

As was said earlier, Isai-gnaaniyaar, the mother of Sundaramoorthi-swaamikal, was given a place of honour in the Periya puraanam on account of her having borne the illustrious son even as Mary is honoured in the Holy Bible and the Church today. Even so, Sekkizhaar has no more than one stanza to sing about her. It strikes us as almost uncharitable to dismiss her like this, but Sekkizhaar had no other material to go upon, nor did Isai-gnaniyars have any other merit to lay a claim for a larger biography. Thus sings Sekkizhaar:

The venerable wife,
the very own treasure of Sadayanaar of undying fame,
gave birth to Nambi*

*Nambi—one of the names of Sundarar.

who was enslaved by the Lord
 who destroyed with His bow
 the indestructible fortresses (three).
 Is it possible to praise with my few paltry words
 the dame Isai-gnaniyar
 hailing from a clan of never-ending ancestry?
 It is not possible;
 it is not possible for anyone else too!

4228-1

* * *

Nor has the biography of Sundarar more than a couple of lines for Isai-gnaaniyaar. These are the lines:

To Sadayanaar,
 in (the womb of) Isai-gnaaniyaar,
 his life-mate of flawless virtue,
 (Sundarar) took holy incarnation
 that the world may be freed from evil
 and be redeemed.

149-13.

* * *

Nambi-andaar-nambi does more justice to her with this stanza:

When people say:

"She gave birth to the excellent bull (among men)
 who rode the elephant of angry blood-shot eyes,
 white hue, and palmyra-like long, hollow trunk,"

and when they say:

"She cherished in her heart,
 the sacred feet of the Holy Haran
 beginning with a skull as alms-bowl in His hand,
 the pure Haran of Aaroor",
 they speak of Gnaani only.

* * *

I had said that the Periya-puraanam is an epic. Eminent scholars have done research in this respect and have found all the needed characteristics of an epic in the Periya-puraanam. Sundaramoorthi-swamikal is the hero of the epic. His mother had, therefore, to be given a place, however small, in the epic.

(iii)

Mangayarkkarasi—Queen among women—fares better in the hands of Sekkizhaar. He spares three stanzas for her. Of these however, the third, as is Sekkizhaar's custom, is an introduction to the next biography. But in the meagre two stanzas Sekkizhaar, amply makes up for the casualness with which Sundarar dismisses her in one phrase, 'vari-valai-k-kai-maani', 'a highly sensitive lady with serried bangles on her arms.'

Sekkizhaar sings:

Unique Queen among woman,
our goddess,
a sprig of the noble clan of the Chola King,
a highly sensitive lady
with serried bangles on her arms,
verily the holy dame on the lotus,
the divine dame who wiped the slur*
on the dynasty of the Southerner**
who ruled over a country
stretching up to Kanyakumari,
and who, by the grace of our Lord,
the Prince from Senbai.
wiped out the misfortune
which had beset our great Tamilnadu
and propagated the use of her clan's sacred white ash
of dazzling brightness—
the feet of those who sing her praises
are fit to be worshipped by me.

4189-1

* * *

Nambi-andaar-nambi is more explicit than Sekkizhaar and shows how the South is indebted to her. He sings:

Since the Paandiyan's great consort
of tresses adorned with fragrant flowers,
a highly sensitive person,
unable to look on patiently
at the fire recoiling on the Southerner**
of battling spear,

*By the Paandiyan becoming a convert to Jainism.
**The Paandiyan king.

informed him*
 who was skilled in Tamil
 that the country may resurge,
 note that she caused thereby ruin
 to the Jains in the South.

* * *

Sekkizhaar concludes with this stanza:

If she has had the privilege
 of having a brilliant song sung about her
 by the meritorious mouth
 of the crown-jewel of the Brahmanas—
 the Prince of Pukali*—
 into which gnosis had been poured
 along with the feed of milk,
 what can I (a mere mortal)
 know about her greatness
 and relate?
 She lived for a long time
 as a guide in the Caivite Faith
 to the king of the South—
 Nedumaaran of spotless fame—
 and, along with him of spotless conduct,
 gained the grace
 of resting under the shadow of the feet
 of the Lord.

4191-3

It is not Sundarar or Nambi-andaar-nambi or Sekkizhaar who does justice to this queen of the Paandiya King, a veritable queen among women. It is Civa-p-prakaasa-swaamikal, who sang the 'Naalvar-naanmani-maalai', who pays an unsurpassable tribute to her. He poses a question to Thirugnaana-Sambandhar himself:

Is it the Mother of the Universe
 Who drew milk from her breast
 into a gold cup in order to feed the child
 on seeing it crying on the bank
 of the tank crowded with lotus leaves,
 or
 the gracious Royal Dame

*Thirugnaanasambandhar.

from whose breast milk spurted
on hearing your plight—
tell me O Sambandhar,
who among these two is the greater?

* * *

The answer is obvious.

These are the only two other women mentioned by Sundarar in a casual manner and dealt with only a shade better by Sekkizhaar.

(iv)

As I have said earlier, Sundarar has not done due justice to womenkind in his poem, Thiruththondaththokai. For, within the ambit of his own poem, in the lives of some of the male devotees listed herein, there are four women who, if only Sundarar had the perspicacity to spot them, would have found an honoured place in his poem, and, consequently, in the Periya-puraanam. But we cannot blame Sundarar. We know that he sang the poem under duress.

It is interesting to note that all the four unsung women did not belong to the hoary past but were contemporaries of Sambandhar and Thirunavukkarasar, his sister Thilakavathiyaar and the wife of Appoothiatalikal, his ardent devotee. The other two are wives of two friends of Sambandhar who was entertained by those housewives in their respective homes. Therefore, Sundarar could have had no reason for not knowing about them, especially when he has sung about the men of their household. It is possible that we are unjust to Sundarar. For he was addressing only those who were seated in the Devaasiran, and, perhaps, the women in question were not there. Also the partisans of Sundarar might point out that the women were included in the sentence:

“Servitor to the servitors of those
beyond the places and times mentioned herein
who had sought and may seek refuge at the Feet,
am I, Aarooran.”

Navukkarasar, intrigued by a free water-booth bearing his name, made enquiries and got acquainted with an admirer of his who had set up the booth. On his invitation, Navukkarasar was a guest at his house. The lady of the house, the wife of Appoothi-atikal, having prepared the food, called her eldest son and bade him cut and bring a plantain leaf from the garden to serve food for the guest. While the boy was cutting a leaf, a snake hidden in its folds bit him on his hand. Instantly, he flicked his hand and saw the snake drop down and slither away. Deeply agitated, he said to himself: "I shall go and deliver the leaf before I fall down under the effect of the speedy poison", and ran into the house. Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale.

With his speed outrunning the speed of the poison,
as he approached the house in great pain,
he said to himself:

"I will not tell anyone
about the snake biting me
lest it stand in the way
of the saint of rare Thavam taking his food",
and with this firm intent,
he entered the house

1808-26

* * *

The fiery poison progressively ascended,
and, when, in its seventh round,
it had reached the head,
his teeth, eyes, and body
became black and scorched,
his speech became indistinct,
and, as he was about to fall in a faint
before giving up his life,
he set down the leaf-platter
by the side of his mother
and crashed to the ground.

1809-27

* * *

Seeing the helplessly falling son,
the mother and the father,

agonised in mind,
noted the bloodless form
and the marks of the teeth of the serpent showing distinctly
on the body,
decided that he died of poison,
and, without any hesitation,
set about planning to serve food to the devotee. 1810-28

* * *

Placing the son, rare to get, in a mat,
and, rolling him up therein,
they hid it on one side
of the courtyard at the back of the house,
and, saying:

“We shall serve food to the devotee
without disclosing this at all”,
they came cheerfully to the renowned guest.

1811-29

* * *

What a woman! What a wife! What a mother! What a devotee!
Any other woman in her place would have raised such a hue and cry that the guest would have rushed out of the house in dismay.
Many a woman would not have been above cursing the devotee as being the cause of her son's tragic death. But here is a loving mother who sees her eldest son fall at her feet and yet mindful of the over-riding duty as a housewife towards a guest, a particularly renowned guest whose spirit ruled the household even before they had set eyes on him, she calmly rolls up the still warm body of her first-born and cheerfully goes along with her husband to announce that the meal is ready.

What happened to the child? This has been said in the chapter on “A Servant of God”.

(v)

And there was Thilakavathi, the sister of Marulneekkiyaar, later to be called Dharmasenar, later still to be named by the Lord Himself as Naavukkarasar, and lastly as ‘Appar’ (Father) by Thirugnaanasambandhar. But for her, Tamilnadu and the world

would not have gained a great mystic and saint. She was his only relative. She was a lady of very strong character. In her maidenhood she had been betrothed to a warrior. Before the wedding could take place, her parents died one after the other. Closely following on the footsteps of this bereavement, her betrothed, an army chieftain, fell in a war he had gone to wage for his king. Saying to herself, "My father and my mother gave me in betrothal to him. On that account I belong to him. Therefore, I shall unite my life with his departed life," she determined to put an end to her life. However, at the entreaties of her young brother, she consented to live for his sake and to bring him up. She kept her word, and with love and care brought up Marulneekkiyaar to manhood. If she had not made the sacrifice, a very great one to her way of thinking, we would not have had Thirunaavukkarasar.

But, unwilling to lead a worldly life, she sought the feet of the Lord that she might tread the pure blissful life of gnosis. One does not and cannot decide on his own initiative, one fine morning, "from this day onwards, I shall lead a deeply religious life". It is not so simple. God's grace is needed in order to seek God. Manikkavaachakar sang: "By His grace, His feet I worshipped." It was on this account that our heroine too sought the grace of the Lord to tread the path unto Him. Sekkizhaar sings:

The dame, who wished for
the irremovable bonds of attachments to fall off,
and to gain unsatiating love unto the Pingakan*
arrived at Thiruvathikai-veerattaanam
of long-standing great glory
on the northern bank
of the perennially flowing river Kedilam.

1307-42

* * *

Arriving there,
she worshipped the feet of the red coral like Hill
abiding at sacred Veerattaanam;
and, from that day onwards,
she bore on her person the insignia of Civan,**

*Epithets for Civan.

**The sacred ash, the beads etc.

and began to perform with great ardour
befitting service with her own hands.

1308-43

* * *

Before it was dawn,
she would perform the pious chore
of sweeping the floor of the temple with the broom
and scrubbing it well
with the dung of a goodly cow
which had passed the stage of post-parturition discharges.
She would, later in the day, pluck flowers
and string garlands for the Lord,
and she would besides perform many other sacred chores
with an earnestness of character
praised by many.

1309-44

* * *

While thus she spent her days in service of the Lord with her hands,
her mind was sore troubled with concern for her brother who she
believed had in truth joined an alien religion. She took her trouble
to the Lord. Let Sekkizhaar continue:

The lady, lamp of impelling Thavam,
worshipped the sparkling Effulgence
and petitioned thus on many an occasion:
“If You, indeed, do graciously rule over my life.
You should rescue him who was born after me
from the pit of an alien religion
which will earn Karma for him.”

1311-46

* * *

“Give up your worry;
your brother had, in a previous birth, striven,
as a sage, to gain Me.
I shall now enter him as a colic pain
and enslave him.”

1313-48

* * *

Thus the Lord pacified her.

And so He did. Dharmasenar, the name which later
Naavukkarasar bore in the Jain monastery, writhed with colic like
a worm in the hot sun. When the Jain monks failed to heal him,

he sent word in despair to his sister and requested her to go to him. But she was a lady of stern principles and strong character. She would not go to him but asked him to come to her. And he came and fell at her feet crying: "Do graciously tell me the way by which I may be redeemed and ascend from this pit and gain firm ground." On hearing his impassioned plea, she bade him rise, and, saying:

"Note that this is nothing but the grace of the Lord with a chaplet on His matted locks," she commanded him thus:

"Go and pay obeisance to the Lord who extirpates attachments of those who have taken refuge at His feet, and serve Him."

1330-65

* * *

On his bowing down to her and submissively accepting her gracious command, the ascetic lady, meditating on the great grace of the Immaculate One, pronounced the Mystic Five Letters and gave him the sacred ash, the insignia of Him Who owns the Kailaas Hill, that he might go and enter the holy temple Veerattam.

1331-66

* * *

On Thilakavathiyaar offering the sacred ash of the mukthi-conferring Lord, the noble one humbly accepted it saying to himself: "A great life has opened out for me," and, applying it all over his body, he followed her who had preceded him in this world and who has now come as one who offers a means of redēmption from what has befallen him.

1332-67

We have seen in the chapter devoted to Naavukkarasar what happened to him when he entered the temple. His sister, who had already been a mother and a father to the orphaned child, now became his guru and his redeemer. She initiated him into the

Five Letters and blessed him with the sacred ash, the panacea for all the ills of the body and the soul, and laid the foundation for his physical cure and his spiritual redemption. That there is no place for such a gem among women in Sundarar's song and the Periyapuraanam is a regrettable lacuna. Even as Christians address prayers to Mary for intercession with Lord Jesus Christ, so is Thilakavathiyaar worthy of our prayers for intercession with Civan even as she interceded for her brother.

(vi)

The next lady who should have found a place in Sundarar's poem is a motherly matron who was as devout a wife as she was a solicitous devotee. She was not a Veeraanganai—a lady of exceptional courage—like the wife of Appoothi Atikal, or a dedicated devotee like Thilakavathiyaar who could challenge the Lord to deny that He rules over her life. We do not know her name. She was just the wife of Neelanakkars. She may not have a place in the chronicles of Sekkizhaar, but she has made a name for herself in the hearts of all discerning students of the Periya-puraanam. As was her custom, she had accompanied her husband to the temple of Lord Civan to assist him in performing the worship. The Pooja—ritualistic worship—was over, but her husband, unable to tear himself away from the presence of the Lord, was staring fixedly at Him and was chanting the Mystic Five Letters. Let Sekkizhaar take up the tale from here onwards:

While the devotee of immeasurable Thavam
was counting on his beads the Mystic Five Letters—
the Truth of all branches of knowledge
beginning from the Vedas onwards—
a spider, slipping from its perch,
fell on the sacred body of the Lord
with the long bow
made of the golden Meru Mountain.

1838-11

* * *

The moment it fell,
the wife who was standing to one side of her husband,
impelled by a suddenly rising fear,
blew, out of welling love, on the spider



to make it go away.
even as a mother would promptly blow to dislodge a
spider
which had fallen on her young infant.

1839-12

* * *

On the wife doing so
out of concern for the Lord,
the holy Brahmana of bonds-bursting Thavam saw this
and, closing his eyes with his hand, cried:
“What have you done, oh witless one!”
and she replied:
“The lightning-like spider fell on Him
and I blew and dislodged it.”

1840-13

* * *

Her husband, incapable of grasping by his mind this deed of love,
said in anger: “You should have done it in some other manner;

instead of doing so, you tried to blow it away, thereby spraying your spittle on the Lord. Therefore, I discard you." As bid by him, the wife went away from him and he returned home after sunset after having duly performed the Pooja. The wife stayed for the night in the temple. And Ncelanakkar, in a mood of self-righteousness, went to bed in his house. Let Sekkizhaar conclude the tale,

After he had gone to bed,
 the transcendent Being abiding in Ayavanthi
 appeared in his dream
 with His flood-waters-imprisoned matted locks
 and, pointing at His own body said:
 "Look! Except for the spot
 on which, with a heart dedicated to Me,
 she blew promptly with her mouth,
 blisters caused by the spider
 have appropriated the rest of the body."

1845-18.

* * *

We need not add that the dim-witted husband took back his wife.

Manikkavaachakar, referring to the solicitude of God, sings:

More solicitous than a mother
 who mindfully suckles her child...

Here was, however, a matron who, impelled by motherly love, blew away a spider from the body of the Lord who had never had a mother. Son there has been to God, servant there has been, friend there has been, but, other than this unnamed matron mother He has never had.

If Sekkizhaar could not give a separate place in his work for this remarkable devotee, for the reason that Sundarar had not mentioned her in his poem, he could have sung about her in another context. That poem occurs in the chronicle of Saakkiyar, the devotee who made a habit of flinging a stone at a Civalingam as an act of worship. In this context, Sekkizhaar sings:

If we look into how the flinging of a stone
 became an act of love,
 did not the sole of the sandal
 of the bow-wielding hunter
 rest on the sacred head (of the Lingam)?
 our good man's contrarious act
 which was impelled by love—
 a stranger to love will call it a stone,
 but to Haran, a flower it turned out to be.

* * *

(vii)

I had hailed the wife of Appoothi Atikal a Veeraanganai, a dauntless woman. But then I had not come to the Chronicle of Chiruththondar which comes eleven chronicles and two hundred and ninety two pages further down in the Periya-puraanam which follows closely the order in which Sundarar mentioned the names of the servitors in his Thiruththondaththokai. In that Calendar of Saints, the name of Appoothi Atikal is the twenty-fifth whereas the name of Chiruththondar is the thirty-sixth, eleven names further down.

When I came to that Chronicle, I felt I had already lavishly spent my stock of words, and now was at a loss for words to adorn the name of the wife of Chiruththondar. What the wife of Appoothi Atikal did was only to roll in a mat the still warm corpse of her son who had died of a snake-bite and to hide it in a corner of the outer courtyard of her house. What she did pâles before the deed of the wife of Chiruththondar which no adjective can embellish. She held the legs of her darling son between her thighs, and his hands in her hands, and watched her husband hack the head of her child. Not only that. Later, she cooked the meat of her son's body and still later his head to provide the special menu demanded by her husband's guest.

Still Sekkizhaar did not do sufficient research to find the names of either the wife of Appoothi Atikal or the wife of Chiruththondar. The former is a nameless person in the Chronicle of Appoothi Atikal while the latter is merely known as Thiru-venkaattu-ammai, The Lady from Thiruvenkaadu.

In another context, Thomas Merton, a great mystic of this century, says: "Metaphor has now become hopeless altogether". So have adjectives in this case. "Brave", "noble", "sacrifice", all such words are futile or misleading. The act of Thiruvenkaattu Ammai was an act of joyously giving up attachment, an act which is the one side of a coin, the other side of which is Mukti, release from the chain of deaths and births. It was an act of exhibition of surrender to a love which is more than human, and a surrender to a God who is more intimate to one than one is to oneself.

But this queen among women was not sung by Sundarar.

Seven such women may be arithmetically only one-ninth of the Saints in the Periya-puraanam, but for love of the Lord and His devotees they count seven times sixty-three. That the women-kind of Tamilnadu are still very great devout servants of God and His devotees is due to the influence these seven women exercise over their minds from the cradle to the grave.

16. UNTOUCHABLES?

(Clause 3C of Soothram 12 of Civagnaanabhodham)

Worshipping Haran Himself

It has been found necessary in the case of a few servitors to treat their lives in two or more chapters. This necessity has risen on account of the plan of construction of this book. Naminandhi Atikal has already figured in the chapter on 'Worshipping the Temple as Haran Himself' on account of his lighting lamps with water in place of oil.

The Panguni-uttaram festival, a festival on the day when the asterism Uttaram is in the ascendent in the month of Panguni, March-April, was and is a very important one at Thiruvaaroor. It was for the purpose of feeding the devotees of the Lord on this day by Paravaiyaar that Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal begged the Lord for gold. On one occasion, our servitor, Naminandhi-Atikal, had joined the crowd in the festival as Lord Thyagesar rode in state from Thiruvaaroor to Manali, a village neighbouring Thiruvaaroor. Sekkizhaar relates;:

On the occasion when Lord of the Devas
rode in state to Manali one day,
people of all castes mingled together
without minding who was who,
and worshipped the Lord:
Our devotee too joined them in worship
and witnessed the festival of the Protector
of the heaven-dwellers, and rejoiced.

1887-22

* * *

He worshipped all the day long,
and worshipped again
when the Lord re-entered His temple.
Later, he went to his village,
but did not enter his free-from-pollution house,
He spent the pitch-dark night
in the front courtyard of the house.

His wife who carefully performs
the household duties
came up to him and said:

1888-23

* * *

"Come in, and finish the worship
of the Lord of the crown with a moon thereon,
and tend the sacred fire,
have your food, and sleep."

To her he replied:

"I worshipped our Lord's state procession
to Manali,
and went along with the procession;
there everyone was going along;
therefore pollution has affected me."

1889-24

* * *

"Therefore", he continued,
"I should bathe and purify myself,
and then enter the house
and begin the Pooja
of the Lord of the Vedas.
For that purpose come here
bringing with you cold water etc."
On his saying so,
his beloved wife hastened
to bring those things.

1890-25

* * *

Just then, was it by the grace of our Lord?
Or was it by the fatigue of the body?
On sleep coming upon him
without a moment's delay,
our pure devotee meditated
on the Lord of the heaven-dwellers
and promptly went to sleep.
When he was thus asleep,
in his dreams,

1891-26

* * *

The Lord Who goes in state
through the streets of Thiruvaaroor the Great,
graciously came

as if He was coming to accept
 the pooja of a our devotee,
 and, after telling him,
 "Behold how all those born in Aaroor
 where Brahmanas of wisdom dwell
 are none other than our ghouls,"
 disappeared from his presence.

1892-27.

* * *

When the primeval Lord had left,
 he woke up, and seized with the fear,
 "I very nearly committed a blunder
 by not performing the Pooja of my Lord,"
 he worshipped the Lord just as he was,
 (without taking a bath
 as he had intended to do to purify himself)
 and told his wife all that had happened.
 When the day dawned,
 he hurried to Thiruvaaroor
 and saw before him that city.

1893-28.

* * *

He saw all those born and abiding
 in the Divine Lord's Thiruvaaroor
 turned into the form of the Lord
 with a throat which looked
 as if it had been painted black,
 their bodies surrounded by a halo of light,
 Holding his arms over his head,
 with palms joined in worshipping pose,
 he prostrated on the ground
 and paid obeisance
 and rejoiced exceedingly.

1894-29.

* * *

On seeing, moreover, the forms change
 and resume their former appearance,
 he humbly bowed to the Lord and prayed;
 "The offence of this serf
 You should graciously forgive."
 Forthwith, he changed his residence
 to Thiruvaaroor
 and continued to increasingly perform
 sacred service in the world.

1895-30.

* * *

17. ORDEAL BY FIRE

The name given to this chronicle by Sekkizhaar is Thiru-naalai-p-povaar Naayanaar Puraanam. Sundarar sings just a short line. He says: "Servitor am I to the perfect Thiru-naalai-p-povaar. Nambi-andaar-nambi sings:—

In this great world, people say that Aathanoor,
surrounded by groves full of mango trees,
is the native place of him
who was otherwise called Naalai-p-povaan,
a holy devotee of a caste beyond the four castes.
Having gained the grace of the Lord in the Hall of Thillai,
whom everyone praise with their tongues,
he got rid of the pollution of his base beastly profession,
and became a sage, worshipped by folded palms
by the three thousand Brahmanas of Thillai.

*

*

*

Aathanoor was a very fertile village and very thickly populated. However, at the very out-skirts of the village, close to the paddy fields, was a colony of people who dealt with the carcasses of animals. They resided in huts roofed by grass over which creepers of the bottle-gourd plant had been trained. They served as labourers of the peasantry who owned the land. By necessity and desire, those people loved to live together in the crowded colony, all of them belonging to the same caste. As usual in such colonies, or, what we call today, slums, poultry and dogs and pigs and puppies and children roamed the streets as companions to one other. Sekkizhaar devotes several stanzas to describe the slum with which we, after eight centuries, are still very familiar. The wives of the carcass-dealers could be found to be drunk on toddy and to dance to the accompaniment of drums.

In these wretched surroundings, dwelt a strange person. He was filled with a rapturous devotion to the anklet-girt feet of Lord Civan. He too followed the same profession as his neighbours.

Such a person of incomparable greatness was called Nandanaar. Let us hear Sekkizhaar describe his state of mind and manner of living. Sekkizhar sings thus:—

From the time he gained knowledgeable age,
filled with a notable great love
towards the magnificent Lord
who has a baby moon as a chaplet on his head,
and gifted with a mind to lead a perfect life,
he would not even by forgetfulness think of anyone else.
And in this present birth
he adopted the profession
hereditary to his caste,
and with an ideal of leading a righteous life,
he transformed his profession itself
into an act of service to God.

1052-12

* * *

Making the gift of land made by the village,
for being its town-crier by beat of drum,
his source of living,
he stood as an expert in the profession
belonging to his caste,
and, by the very same means,
he provided gifts of skin coverings to the drums
and other percussion instruments
in temples of the Lord.

1053-13

* * *

In this way he provided
the strings for the musical instruments,
and the very fragrant gorochana,
a product from the abdomen of a cow,
used in worship of the Lord.
In this manner, wherever possible,
he carried out his profession,
but, nevertheless, he used to stand before
the sacred gates of temples,
and, on account of excess of ecstasy,
used to dance and sing
in praise of the Lord. On one such day,

1055-15

* * *

meditating unceasingly on the rosy feet
of Civalokan, Lord Civan, of Thiruppunkoor,
and driven by his tormenting passion
he went from Aathaanoor to Thiruppunkoor

to perform his own type of services there to the Lord.

1056-16.

* * *

The Lord at Thiruppunkoor,
desirous of enabling him to see Him directly,
and worship Him with dance and songs,
graciously made the Nandhi lying before him
to move to one side,
and manifested Himself to His devotee.

1057-17.

* * *

Perhaps the Lord ordered Nandi the bull to move aside as much for Himself to see Nandanaar without Nandhi obstructing His view as for Nandanaar to see Him.

After Nandanaar had worshipped the Lord to his satisfaction, he turned to go back to his own village. But noticing beside the temple a shallow pit, he desired to dig a tank at that spot and carried out his design forthwith. Then he returned to his village.

In this manner Nandanaar travelled from shrine to shrine and worshipped the Lord. All the time, however, a great desire to go to holy Thillai and pay his homage to the Lord abiding in that temple grew day by day until one night he did not sleep at all.

That night he would not close his eyes in sleep:
When it dawned, he thought:
"Proceeding there
and the caste to which I belong
do not suit each other,"
and, consoling himself with the thought
"This idea too is born by the Lord's bidding,"
would give up the attempt to go there.
And when the good idea became intense,
he would say to himself,
"Tomorrow will I go there."

1052-22.

* * *

He must have spent many years saying to himself and others, "Tomorrow will I go." And it became a cruel nick-name, a term of derision till, perhaps, at last, people had forgotten his original name, and remembered him by the reply he gave day in day out to all and sundry whenever they baited him with the question, "When are you going to Thillai?" This answer has stuck as his name so fast that when Sekkizhaar came to write his chronicle, no one remembered his real name. Sekkizhaar had to be content with referring to him by the derisive name.

But as days passed with him saying each day, "I shall go there tomorrow," unable to bear any longer the despondency of his inability to go there, one day he left his village and set out for Thillai, which he reached in due course. Sekkizhaar relates:

While he was going there, he fell prostrate
at the borders of Thillai,
and, rising to his feet, he noticed
several fires in the sacrificial pits,
and columns of smoke rising therefore.
On his approaching the places
where the Vedas were being recited,
he remembered his caste, grew frightened,
ceased to move ahead any further,
and stood rooted to the spot.

1063-23.

Standing there, he thought how more and more difficult would be his position if he proceeded further into the city, and, in despair, thought it is impossible to enter the city, and therefore, made a clockwise tour of the city's outskirts. In this manner, day and night he was going round and round the city and despaired of ever being able to worship the Lord with the dark-hued throat.

He went to sleep saying to himself, "This lowly birth of mine which gives me so much trouble is the real obstruction." The Lord, who dances in the hall in Thillai, coming to know his state of mind, desired to put an end to all his troubles and came forward before him in his dream and spoke to him with a smile gracing His lips.

"To get rid of this birth," the Lord said,
"Divine into a fire,
and come out with the chest adorned
by the thread of three strands,
and come forward."

In the same manner, the Lord appeared
in their dreams to the Brahmanas dwelling in Thillai,
and commanded them to prepare a fire.
Thus the Being who is the only Reality,
graciously ordered,
and returned to His Dancing Hall.

1068-28.

All the Brahmanas who heard the command of our Lord,
filled with fear, arrived in the presence
of the dancing Lord and said,
“We shall carry out the command
graciously given by the Real Being.”
And having paid their obeisance to the Lord,
approached the holy devotee with great eagerness
and said:

1069-29.

“By the grace of the Dancing Lord, O Sire,
we have now come to you,
in order to raise a hot fire for you.”



On their saying so,
 the holy devotee of shining mind
 said to himself, "I am redeemed!"
 and fell at their feet and worshipped them.
 The Brahmana sages later brought him news
 of their having prepared the fire.

* * *

After the Brahmanas had delivered their message,
 he arrived at that pit of fire,
 prepared by the Brahmanas
 at the command of the Lord
 with the special type of hair-do,
 close to the moon-touching southern ramparts
 of the temple.

1071-31.

* * *

He worshipped the Lord with joined palms,
 meditated on the anklet-girt feet,
 and entered the fire.



The very moment he entered the fire,
 his delusive false appearance lost its form,
 and in the form of a great Muni of great virtue,
 he rose from the fire
 with the white thread shining on his body,
 and matted locks to match.

1072-32.

* * *

When the ruddy fire rose in the sky,
 he seemed like Brahma
 seated on the rosy lotus flower.
 In the high sky, sounds of Dundubhi rose:
 the heavenly beings applauded with joy:
 and they showered rains of flowers
 and clusters of the Manthaara blossoms.

1073-33

Everybody rejoiced and paid the transformed Nandanaar humble obeisance, and he entered the temple precincts to worship the Dancing Lord in the Golden Hall. The Brahmanas residing in Thillai also accompanied him. But when he reached the boundary line of the Hall where the Lord was dancing, nobody saw him any more.

The Brahmanas were bemused. The great sages sang his praises. The Lord enslaved Naalai-p-povaar.

It must be confessed that this account by Sekkizhaar of the transfiguration of Nandanaar, the dealer in the carcasses of dead animals, into a holy sage goes against the grain of all the special characteristics of the chronicles recorded in the Periya-Puranaam. A potter gained Mukti as a potter, fisherman as a fisherman, a toddy-tapper as a toddy-tapper, everyone of the sixty three except Thiru-naalai-p-povaar gained Mukti without undergoing the ordeal by fire as Nandanaar had to.

Sekkizhaar has not done justice to the poignant pathos inherent in the life-story of Thirunaalai-p-povaar.

Ample amends, however, have been made by Gopalakrishna Bharatiyaar in his poetic drama on Nandanaar. Take, for instance, the first word with which a verse of his poem begins—“Varuhalaamo?”

This one word of five letters in Tamil contains in it all the pathos, all the accumulated recollections of insult, of rejection, of derision, of denial. Poor Nandanaar as an outcaste was obliged in his times to stop at the entrance to any street in which the high caste people lived. Standing there, he had to cry out in a loud voice this same word, "May I enter, may I come in?" Immediately all the high caste people used to rush into their house and bolt their doors. The despised and untouchable Nandanaar the Parraiyan, then went along the street, and announced at the other end of the street his arrival there which meant that people could now come out of their houses. The very sight of Nandanaar was believed to pollute the bodies of the high caste people.

May I come, O Sire near at hand to You,
to stand before You,
and rejoice and sing?
(May I come.....)" etc.

Treasure of Compassion,
transcending all compassion,
are You not?
This Parrayan, is he fit
to pay You compliments?
Your extremely blissful dance to see,
(May I come.....) etc.

In the world, alas, as a Pulayan,
have I been born:
Without doing deeds which earn merit,
alas, have I remained.
(May I come.....) etc.

O Sire, to Your presence have I come! Several
seas of sorrow have I left behind. To the shore
of all those have I crossed over.
Surrender unto You have I gained.
O Thillai's Varadaa!
To the extinction of my feverish longing,
and my sins.
(May I come.....) etc.

The pauses between each sentence, and the placing of the following word at the end of the lines, several spaces away from the rest of the words in the same line, is a device of the poet to mark the sobs which shook the frame of Nandanaar as he most diffidently made his plea. The word, 'Varuhalaamo'—'May I come?'—is a haunting

phrase which must move the most hardened heart of the hide-bound of the so-called superior castes.

Appar sings:

Billions of riches, trillions of riches,
giving them both to us,
were they in addition to give us
suzerainty over the earth and the heavens too,
perishable wretches, their wealth,
we will not esteem
if they are nor single-minded devotees
of Maadevan.
(On the other hand),
even if they are lepers
with all their limbs eaten away and rotting,
Pulaiyars who revel in skinning the carcasses of cows
and eating the carrion,
provided they are devotees to Him
who has hidden the River Ganga
in His matted locks,
note that they are the God we worship!

—Appar, Vol. VI—d. 95—st. 10

* * *



This God of Appar, Nandanaar, than whom there was no greater single-minded devotee of Maadevan, was obliged to go through a raging fire to become a sage with a strand of white shining thread across his chest, to gain Mukti!

And this instruction was issued by Lord Civan, He whom Thirumoolar defined as Love incarnate—"Anbe Civam", and, in a later context, declared "Ondre Kulam; Oruvane Kadavul"—All people are equal in the eyes of God, and there is but one God. This chronicle, as it stands, offends against these two greatest pronouncements.

18. IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

[Clause 3C of Soothram 12 of Civagnaana Bhodham]

Worship Haran Himself

"And the word was God". We saw that Saint Thirugnaana-sambandhar commenced his life as an accredited brahmin at the age of seven, lauding the greatness of the Panchaaksharam—the Mystic Five Letters, Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya, and concluded his life praising again the peerless merit of the Five Letters. These letters are both the Word and God. For Namachchivaaya is the greatest of the hundreds of names given to Lord Civan. It is the word with which Saint Manikkavachakar begins his 'Handbook of Theology', the Thiruvaachakam.

Aanayaar was born in a family of cowherds called Aayar or Idayar in Tamil, who lived in Thirumangalam, a village in Mel-Mazhanaadu, West Mazhanaadu, a section of Cholanaadu. He was the chief of the clan of Aayars. Of this servitor, Sekkizhaar sings:

To adorn the clan of Aayars, he incarnated;
he belonged to the group of servitors of the Lord
who loved the pure sacred ash;
with the speech, with his sincerely worshipping mind,
and with activities of the body,
he was one who cherished
nothing but the foot of the Lord
Who dances with ghouls.

934-9.

In manifold ways our servitor laboured to increase the herds of cows of his clan. Sekkizhaar, after relating in detail the daily activities directed towards this end by our servitor, concludes:

Labouring thus to increase the herds of cows,
and with his cowherds
always carrying out his commands,
the protector who cherished the Aayar clan
took to playing on the flute

music charged with love
set on the sacred foot of his Lord.

947-22

* * *

On that hollowed-out instrument, our Lord's Letters Five he played and bestowed the nectar of music on all mobile and immobile creatures which had been arrested by his music.

With sandals under his rosy feet, a switch in one hand and the flute in the other, surrounded by herds of cows and calves along with their guarding herdsmen, every day he set out daily dressed for the part to tend his cattle.

One day when he was thus tending his cattle which were scattered on all sides, he came to a Kondrai tree. The tree with its clusters of flowers which reminded him of a garland strung with fragrant flowers, and the russet-golden matted locks of Lord Civan, he stood rooted to the ground, and with melting heart and concentrated mind opened the flood-gates of his love. Straightway he put the flute to his lips and there issued a flood of music which spread everywhere around bearing on it the Letters Five of the Holy Lord.

Herds of cows ceased to chew the cud,
fell into a trance and gathered around him,
calves with milk-froth ringed mouths
ceased to suckle at the teats of their mothers,
bands of bulls with spreading horns,
deers and other forest fauna,
all with hair on their hides atingle,
gathered around.

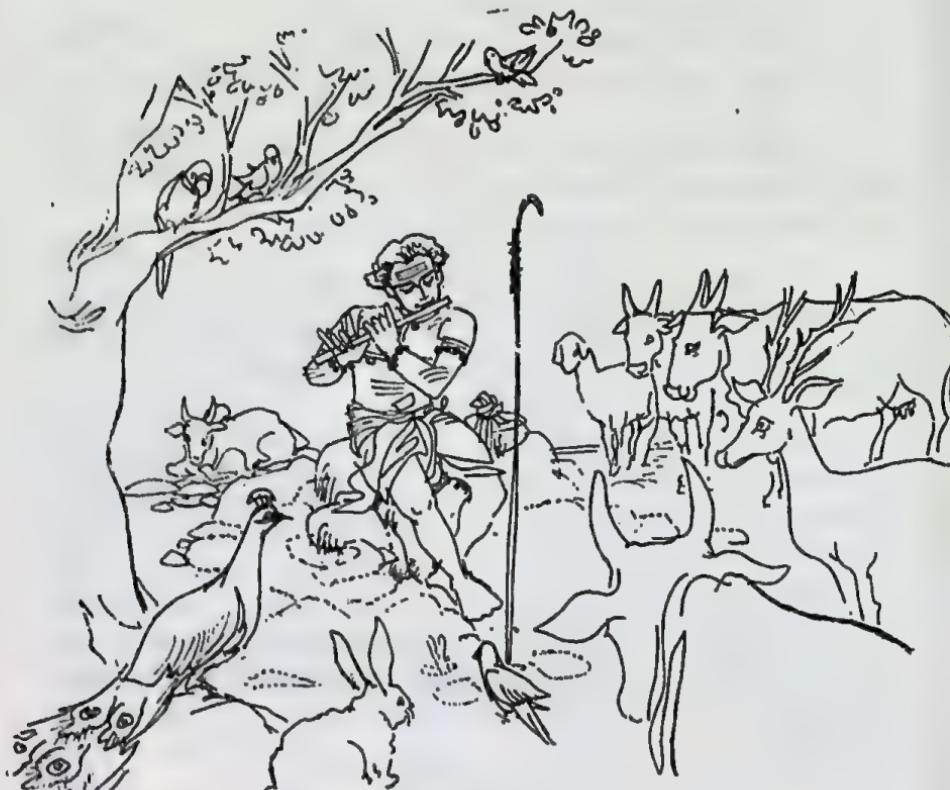
—955-30.

* * *

Dancing flocks of peacocks
ceased their strutting and gathered around him,
coveys of birds, their hearts filled with the music
which entered through their ears,
roosted around him, with roosted senses,
the hefty herdsmen
working in the neighbourhood
gathered round him,
leaving aside half-finished jobs.

956-31.

* * *



Denizens of the underworld of snakes
debouched through underground passages,
mountain-dwelling maids
many many massed around
mazed in their minds,
Vinjayars, Saaranars, Kinnarars, Amarars,
heaven-dwellers all of undiminishing luminance,
all in a daze, on the beautiful sky above,
in their chariots in the clouds crowded they.

957-32.

* * *

As the tormentors and the tormented
enjoyed with the same emotions,
the snake of mouth full of pearly teeth
swooned and fell on the peacock;
the lion of unflagging ferocity
and the massive elephant sat together;
beside the jaws of the tiger,
the delicate-mouthed deer bedded.

959-34.

The blowing breeze forebore to blow;
 trees their blossom-laden branches
 ceased to sway;
 falls of water failed to fall down the fells,
 wild rivers from virgin forest,
 ceased to roar as they rushed along;
 banks of bulging clouds
 their sailing stalled,
 with-held their waters,
 thunder ceased to thunder in the vast sky,
 the seven seas ceased to swell.

960-35

* * *

The music of the fluting
 of the hollow reed,
 filling the world and capturing the heavens,
 rose in volume vast enough
 to reach the holy ears
 of the out-of-reach-of-deceitful-devotion Sire
 Who dances in the Golden Hall.

962-37

* * *

On graciously hearing
 the music of the flute of Aanaayar,
 the creator of Music, the Lord
 with an eye on the forehead,
 accompanied by the willowy Dame of austerities.
 Whose heart was compassion incarnate,
 mounted the bull
 and appeared on the aerial highway
 with His matted locks, the Nursery of the Moon,
 trailing behind Him.

963-38

* * *

It must be noted that the Panchaakshara and the Om are one and the same thing, but Namacivaaya or Civaayanama is not a synonym of Om. A synonym has never the very same connotation of the word of which it is a synonym. Namacivaaya and Civaayanama and Om are one and the same thing, of equal spiritual significance and merit. To prefix the Panchaakshara with Om will amount to tautology.

The Rudram, in the core of which the Panchaakshara occurs, does not prefix it with Om; when Manikkavaachakar sang, 'Naaneyo thavam seithen, Civaayanama ena-p-petren' he did not prefix the word with Om. Nor did he do so when he opened the very first decad of his Thiruvaachakam with 'Namachchivaaya Vaazhgai'.

(ii)

Rudra-pasupathi-naayanaar was another servitor of Lord Civan who gained mukti by doing no more than constantly chanting the Rudram at all hours of the day, standing up to his neck in the waters of a pond. Rudra-pasupathiyaar did not need to do any more than repeat the Rudram, for it contains in its heart the Panchaaksharam, which, in its turn, contains in its heart the term 'Civa', called by scholars Aksha- radvayam—the Two Letters, the shortest and the greatest word the alphabets served to create, and thereby gained eternal glory.

As Sri C. K. Subrahmaniya Muthaliyaar, the learned commentator observes:

Among the three Vedas Yajur is the central one. In the eleventh 'Anuvaaka' which is in the centre of the seven cantos of this Veda, the Rudram shines as the sixth Sookta, the midmost of eleven Sooktas, of that Anuvaaka. In the centre of the Rudram is the Sri Panchaakshara. In the centre of the Panchaakshara is the syllable 'Civa'. Thus the Rudram gains merit as the heart of the Vedas.

"Just as the body gains merit by possessing the eyes, the Vedas gain merit by possessing the Rudram. This Rudram is considered as the eye to the Veda-Purusha, Lord Civan, and the Panchaakshara is considered as the pupil of the eye. Thus comments "Chatur-Veda-Thaathparya-sangraha."

It is no wonder that this Rudram of such unique significance is chanted at all Homams, worship performed at sacrificial fires. The practice is for eleven sanctified pots of water into which the Lord has been invoked to be worshipped by eleven Pundits. These

Pundits chant the Rudram eleven times. Each round of the chanting of the Rudram is followed by the chanting of one Anuvaakam of the 'Chamakam' which has eleven Anuvaacakams or sections. The Chamakam is a prayer to the Lord to provide all the articles required for a Homam. The list is exhaustive and comprehensive, from lentils of several varieties to fuel, from ghee to fruits.

It is no wonder that Pasupati-naayanaar chose to chant the Rudram. Sekkizhaar records:

With the chirping of the birds making an unending din,
and the bees buzzing around,
in the waters teeming with fish and flaming lotus
he entered.

1036-5.



With the clear cool water reaching up to his neck
 he stood with joined palms held over his head
 and chanted the Rudram
 with an intensity of love
 welcome to the Lord of matted locks
 in which splashes the water of the Ganges
 raising foam-crested waves.

1036-6.

* * *

The Lord was pleased with this unique service of the Servitor who, in due course, reached the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. By merit of chanting the Rudram, he gained the haven of the dancing feet of the Lord. On him the Lord conferred the name Rudra-Pasupathiyaar.

Thus when Rudra-Pasupathiyaar was chanting all the day long the Rudram, he was chanting nothing less than the same Panchaakshara which Aanaayar played on his flute and gained Saha-deha-mukti, Mukti without abandoning the human body.

Pasupathiyaar hailed from Thiruththalaiyoor, situated on the southern bank of a canal which is three-quarters of an hour's walk to the east of the railway station Komaangudi on the Mayillaaduthurai-Peralam Railway Line of the Southern Railway.

19. THAAL—THALAI

Kootruva-naayanaar was the chieftain of Kalanthai, (also called Kalar or Kalappaal) about 14 kilometers from Thiruth-thurai-p-poondi Railway Station on the Mayiladuthurai-Kaaraikkudi line. Sekkizhaar records:

Wars with his enemies
by the might of his shoulders he won;
noted was he for repeating with his sacred tongue
Na-ma-ci-vaa-ya, the good name
of the Lord armed with a trident;
for many a day he had been adorning
and praising the feet of the devotees of the Lord,
and was engaged in service of foremost rank. 3930-1.

* * *

On account of the strength of the grace of the Lord,
the Kings avoided war with him,
and he brought all the world under his feet;
amass also did he limitless wealth;
noted was he for the pride of possession
of the four wings of an army,
the elephant corps, cavalry, chariots, foot-soldiers. 3931-2.

* * *

He made further conquests and annexed the countries of all opposing kings, and was a sovereign in all respects except that he had no crown. Sekkizhaar continues:

The protector of the prosperous world,
to be crowned king with the gemset crown,
requested the Brahmanas dwelling in Thillai;
but they refused saying:
“None other than the Eldest of the ancient clan
of the Sembiyars would we invest with the crown;”
and set out to seek refuge in the Hilly Country of the
Chera King. 3933-4.

* * *

When the Thillai-dwelling Brahmanas of unique right had reached the Chera Country, leaving but one family to guard the crown, Kootruvanaayanaar, depressed in mind, and plagued by indecisions, prayed at the feet of the Lord dancing in the Hall in Thillai.

On the night of that day,
on the devotee who went to sleep
without abandoning his entreaty to the Lord
that he should receive the blessings of gaining
His blossom-like feet as his crown,
the Lord bestowed His blossom feet
in his dream.
By means of this grace which befell him,
he wore the feet as his crown
and uniquely ruled all over the world.

39935-7.

* * *

He reigned for a long time, making endowments for the proper worship of the Dancing Lord in all the temples in his country where the Lord abides, and in due course reached the haven of the feet of the Consort of Uma.

The most unique state of ever wearing the feet of the Lord on one's head is called 'thaal-thalai', the 'feet on head' state, in Caiva-Siddhaanta Philosophy and is rightly considered the highest favour the Lord confers on any soul. The 'Thiruvarutpayan', one of the fourteen canonical books of the Caiva Siddhaanta Philosophy in its 74th verse discloses the significance of this unique and highest state of spiritual union with the Godhead. Just as the two words, 'thaal' and 'thalai' become 'thaadalai' by rules of 'sandhi', that is fusion of two words to form one word, similarly the feet of the Lord and the head of the devotee become, speaking figuratively, inseparably and eternally fused. This is the integration where, according to Caiva-Siddhaanta Philosophy, "God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experientially 'one spirit'.

20. APPAALUM-ADI-SAARNTHAAR

There are nine chronicles in the Periya-Puraanam which deal with collective bands of servitors of the Lord. The first among them is the Chronicle of Thillai-dwelling Brahmins, and the last is the Chronicle of 'Appaalum-adi-saarnthaar — The Servitors from Regions beyond Tamilnadu who gained the Haven of the Feet of the Lord."—The first eight collective chronicles have been omitted from this book. But the last one has been reserved till the last as a fitting end to this book. This chronicle comprises just one stanza. A very precious stanza, a stanza which condenses within its four lines the Universality of Sanaatana Dharma. It is an eternal religion which has the entire universe for its territory on account of the universality of its dogmas. Sekkizhaar gave expression to this truth in one stanza. He sang:

The people who dwelt and dwell
in regions beyond the country
where the authority of the Three Kings
(Cola, Cera, Paandiya Kings) prevails
and the Tamil language is prevalent,
and who lived before and live after
the times of the servitors
spoken of in Thiru -thonda-th-thokai
(the Calendar of the Sacred Servitors of Lord Civan),

a ballad spun by the lips of Vanthondar,
such of those among them who sought shelter
under the feet of Lord Civan
who wears on His flower-decked matted locks
the Adambu and Thumbai blossoms,
a freshly waxing moon and the Kondrai flowers
and who bears aloft a victorious flag
bearing the emblem of a bull,
they are the Servitors from Regions Beyond
spoken about by Sundarar in his ballad.

4169-1.

* * *

EPILOGUE

"A mystic" says Thomas Merton, himself a great mystic in the 20th Century, "is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances toward God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge."

"In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own will. Yet, at the same time, his surrender is to a God who is 'more intimate to him' than his own self."

Readers who have patiently read and studied this book from beginning to end will affirm that all the sixty-three servitors were mystics of the highest order and were men who conducted their lives according to the *Tuirukkural* and the *Civa-gnaana-bodham* which are Tamilnadu's secular and spiritual gifts to the world's literature.

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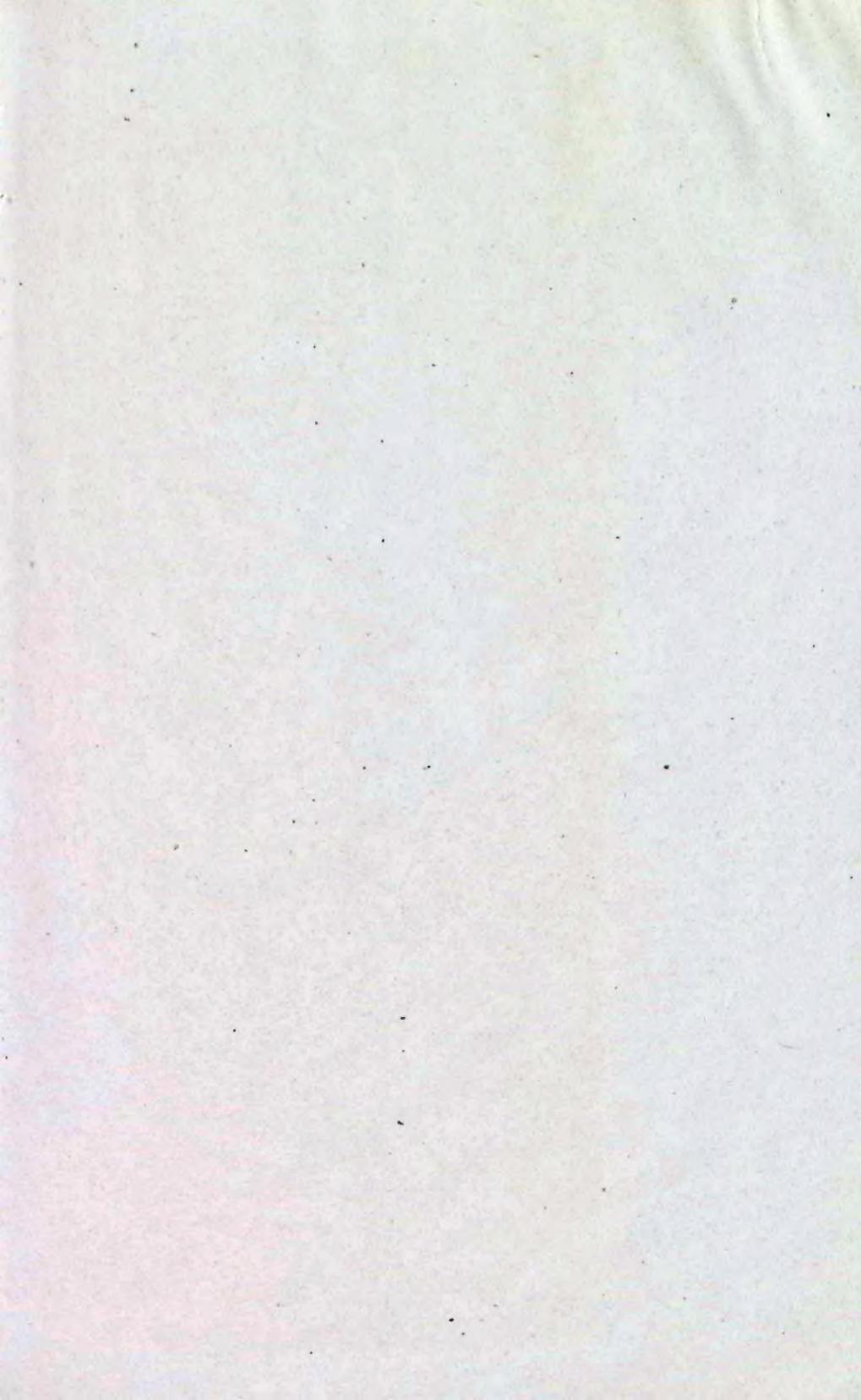
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He is the Word,
He is the Succour,
He is the Vedas,
He is the Effulgence,
He is the Heavenly One;
on worshipping His golden feet,
well-establishing them in the heart,
when my enemies did tie a stone column to me
and launched me on the sea,
What turned out to be the best succour
was verily Namachchivaaya:

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